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AJAX

SOPHOCLES

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Sophocles was one of the three great Greek tragic playwrights. Born at Colonus in Attica ca. 496 BCE, he was an active participant in public life, serving as state treasurer for Athens and being elected *strategos* three times. He enjoyed a long and distinguished literary career, writing 123 plays and winning the victory at the City Dionysia 18 times. Only seven of his plays have survived. He was responsible for several innovations in the tragic dramatic form and was noted for his dexterity of language and high dramatic tension. His *Ajax* is thought to be his earliest surviving play but is evidence of a genius already in full bloom, and this volume argues that it is one of his later plays.

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Introduction

§ 1. Among the plays of Sophocles there were many, as titles and fragments show, of which the scene was laid at Troy, and of which the action was founded on the epics of the Trojan cycle. This series ranged over the whole course of the ten years' war, from its earliest incidents, as told in the *Cypria*, down to the fall of the city, as told in the *Iliupersis*. The *Philoctetes* is connected with this series, but the *Ajax* is the only remaining piece which actually belongs to it. The story is taken from sources later than the *Iliad*, but the conception of the hero, though modified by that later legend, is fundamentally Homeric.

In the *Iliad*, Ajax, the son of Telamon, comes to Troy from Salamis with twelve ships, and is stationed on the extreme left of the army, at the east end of the camp—as Achilles holds the corresponding post of honour on the right. He is an independent chief—subject only to the allegiance which all the chiefs owe to the Captain General, Agamemnon. There is no reference to his descent from Aeacus; nor is there anything that connects him especially with Athens. He has a well-recognised rank as being, next to Achilles, the greatest warrior in the Greek army. Gigantic in stature—taller by a head and shoulders than his fellows—and of a massive frame, he is emphatically the 'bulwark' of the Greek host. In comeliness, too, he is second only to the son of Peleus; but 'huge Ares' is the god to whom he is compared; and when he is described 'with a smile on his grim face,' it is in the joy of battle. The Homeric poet illustrates the qualities of his valour—both impetuous and obstinate—by likening him, first, to a lion in his onset, and then, when he is forced back by superior numbers, to a stubborn ass, whom boys, with feeble but incessant blows, laboriously cudgel out of a cornfield. Staunch and steadfast, he never fails his friends at need—whether it be some individual comrade, such as his half-brother Teucer, whom he protects, or whether he comes to the rescue of the whole army at some crisis. In the absence of Achilles, it is only Ajax who is a match for Hector. The sevenfold shield of Ajax is not only his characteristic attribute, but the symbol of his service—great in attack, but especially signal in defence: and as the mighty shield is compared in the *Iliad* to a tower, so its owner himself is elsewhere called 'a tower of strength' to the Achaeans.

The Athena of Sophocles speaks of Ajax as pre-eminent not only for bravery but for prudence. This is true to the picture of him in the *Iliad*. Once, indeed, after he has uttered a defiant and menacing challenge, Hector calls him 'a blunderer, a clumsy braggart'; as, in Shakespeare, Thersites calls him a 'beef-witted lord,' and Ulysses, 'the lubber Ajax.' In another place, however—when he agrees, at the herald's suggestion, to break off his combat with Hector, though he was having the best of it—his chivalrous opponent recognises Ajax as one to whom the gods have given, not only 'stature and might,' but 'understanding.' His good sense is conspicuous in the embassy to Achilles, where he is the colleague of Odysseus and Phoenix. It is he who perceives when the moment has come for ceasing to press the inexorable hero. 'Let us go hence; for I do not think that the end of our message can be gained by this mission.' He points out to his companions that it seems hopeless to move Achilles at present: and then, turning to Achilles himself, he addresses him in words of frank reproach, but also of friendly appeal and of cordial good-will.

One trait, however, marks an important difference between the Homeric and the later conception. In the play of Sophocles Ajax appears as one who has offended Athena by the presumptuous self-confidence with which he has rejected divine aid in war. There is no trace of this in the *Iliad*. While he is arming for the combat with Hector, he exhorts the Greeks to pray that Zeus may help him. In the battle at the ships, after splendid deeds of valour, he retreats when he perceives, with a thrill of awe, that, for the time, the gods are against him. During the battle over the body of Patroclus, when a thick mist has fallen on the field, his prayer for light breathes reverent submission to the will of Zeus.

Such is the Ajax of the *Iliad*; a mighty champion of the Greeks in their sorest need; a man of good sense and good feeling, sparing of words, but able to speak wisely in season; loyal to his friends; straightforward and unselfish; frankly conscious of his strength, but placing his reliance on the help of the gods, and yielding, even in the fiercest struggle, to revelations of their mind.

A contest between Ajax and Odysseus for the arms of Achilles, resulting in the defeat and suicide of Ajax, is first mentioned in the *Odyssey*, where the sullen shade of the injured hero refuses to hold converse with the victor. It was the goddess Thetis who set her son's arms for a prize; 'the judges were the children of the Trojans and Pallas Athena.'

§ 2. The whole passage evidently presupposes some well-known work or works in which the contest for the arms had been related more at length. The scholiast says that 'the story comes from the Cyclic poets.' There are two poems, and two only, which are known to have contained that story. One is the *Aethiopis*, by Arctînus of Miletus, which may be placed about 776 B.C. The other is the *Little Iliad*, which in later antiquity was commonly (though not universally) ascribed to Lesches, of Pyrrha, near Mitylene, and of which the approximate date is 700 B.C.

In the *Aethiopis*, which contained the death of Achilles, Ajax played a foremost part in rescuing the corpse from the Trojans—an episode imitated from the fight over the body of Patroclus in the *Iliad*. As to the manner in which Arctînus conceived the contest for the arms, only two details are known. (1) After the award, Podaleirius—the physician, skilled in diagnosis of obscure ailments, as his brother Machaon was the great surgeon—perceived a fierce light in the eyes of Ajax, and a weight upon his spirit, which were the precursors of the end:

> ὅς ῥα καὶ Αἴαντος πρῶτος μάθε χωομένοιο
> ὄμματά τ᾽ ἀστράπτοντα βαρυνόμενόν τε νόημα.

(2) Arctînus described Ajax as killing himself 'about dawn'—doubtless on the morning after the award. There is no reason to think that Arctînus mentioned that delusion of Ajax by Athena which caused his slaughter of the cattle. The scanty evidence rather suggests that the rage in the hero's soul was not expressed in any deed of violence, but that he passed in seclusion, perhaps within his tent, the few hours of darkness between his defeat and his death. It is highly probable that the older and simpler form of the Ajax-myth knew nothing of his insane onslaught on the cattle, by which Athena averted his vengeance from the Greek chiefs. The motive of his suicide, in this older version, seems to have been simply resentment at the award—not that feeling combined with a sense of disgrace incurred by his own action. Such is certainly the impression given by the passage in the *Odyssey*. It is given also by Pindar, when he says, 'The Danaoi paid court to Odysseus by secret votes, and Ajax, robbed of the golden arms, wrestled with death.' Pindar agrees with Arctînus in saying that Ajax died about dawn—a coincidence which can hardly be accidental.

There is another point, however, in which it seems probable that they diverged. According to Pindar, the Greek chiefs were the judges in the

contest for the arms. This account, which Sophocles follows, is fitted to win sympathy for Ajax, who appears as a victim of jealousy and of ingratitude on the part of men who had the best reason to know that he was second only to Achilles. But the *Odyssey* testifies to that other version according to which the judges were 'the children of the Trojans and Pallas Athena.' The words of the scholiast there deserve attention: 'The story is from the Cyclic poets. Agamemnon, on his guard against seeming to favour either of the competitors for the arms of Achilles, brought some Trojan prisoners, and asked them by which of the two heroes they had been more injured,' etc. There is no reason to doubt that the scholiast knew of this account as given in some poem (or poems) of the Epic Cycle. There is no warrant for assuming that he invented this statement to explain the verse on which he was commenting. But the *Aethiopis* and the *Little Iliad* are, so far as we know, the only Cyclic poems to which his allusion could refer. And in the *Little Iliad* the award of the arms was decided, not by Trojan prisoners in the Greek camp, but (as will be seen presently) by Trojan opinion reported from Troy itself. Presumably, then, it was in the *Aethiopis* that the Trojan prisoners acted as judges. Since that poem dated from the earlier part of the eighth century (*circ.* 776 B.C.), the verse in the Nekyia of the *Odyssey*, "παῖδες δὲ Τρώων δίκασαν καὶ Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη", may have been founded upon it. The Nekyia is, in great part, older, probably, than 800 B.C., but unquestionably received some additions in the course of the eighth and seventh centuries. It is not necessary, however, to suppose that the Nekyia was here indebted to the *Aethiopis*. Both may have used some older source now unknown. When the Homeric poet associates 'Pallas Athena' with the Trojan judges, he need not be understood as conceiving that she actually presided over the award—as in the *Eumenides* she presides at the first session of the Areiopagus—but merely that she influenced the minds of the arbiters.

§ 3. The author of the *Little Iliad* seems to have worked in a spirit quite different from that of Arctînus. The *Aethiopis* was a grave epic, more in the temper of the *Iliad*; while the other poem had more affinity to the *Odyssey*, more of the lighter Ionian vein, and a larger element of romance. The contest for the arms was managed in a way which indicates the desire to avoid imitation of some earlier poet who had referred the award to the Trojan captives. By Nestor's advice, the Greeks send spies to the walls of Troy, in the hope that they may overhear some Trojan comments on the

rival Greek heroes. The spies are fortunate. At that very moment two Trojan maidens are discussing Ajax and Odysseus. One of them deems Ajax the braver, since he carried the corpse of Achilles out of the fray. The other, inspired by Athena, reproves her—'even a woman can bear a burden, when it is laid on her—but she cannot fight'—and added, doubtless, that it was Odysseus who had protected the retreat. The Greek chiefs, on hearing the report of their messengers, adjudged the arms to Odysseus. Ajax, stricken with frenzy, made the onslaught on the flocks and herds of the Greeks: and afterwards slew himself. Agamemnon, probably by the counsel of the seer Calchas, decreed that the body of Ajax should not receive the customary form of funeral—*i.e.*, should not be burned, but should be placed in a coffin, and interred. Here, then, we have two traits which are distinctive of the story as handled by Sophocles, the onslaught of the mad Ajax on the cattle, and the idea that, after his death, his body was liable to be treated with some degree of penal dishonour. Both these traits, so far as can now be judged, were peculiar to the *Little Iliad*. In the other version—that indicated in the *Odyssey* and by Pindar, and probably given by Arctînus—Ajax died guiltless of offence against the Greeks, and received, like Achilles, the spontaneous and uncontested tribute of public mourning.

§ 4. Before the age of the Attic dramatists, the Ajax legend received some further developments which were probably unknown to the Cyclic poets. One of these was the enrolment of Ajax among the Aeacidae. The *Iliad* bestows the name of "Αἰακίδης" on two persons only—Peleus, the son, and Achilles, the grandson, of Aeacus. The logographer Pherecydes (*circ.* 480 B.C.) made Telamon the son of Actaeus and Glaucè, a daughter of the Aeginetan hero Cychreus—recognising no tie, except friendship, between Telamon and Peleus. According to another legend, however, both Peleus and Telamon were sons of Aeacus by Endeïs ("Ενδηΐς"="ἔγγαιος" or "ἔγγειος", from the Doric "δᾶ"="γῆ"). The cult of Aeacus, son of Zeus, had its chief seat in the island called after his mother, the nymph Aegina. Telamon and Ajax belonged to Salamis. By making Telamon and Peleus brothers, the Aeginetans linked their local hero with the others. This engrafting of Telamon and his son on the Aeacid stock had gained general acceptance before the fifth century B.C. The sculptures of Athena's temple at Aegina date from the period of the Persian wars. On the east pediment Heracles and Telamon were the prominent figures; on the west, Ajax was

seen defending the corpse of Achilles. Herodotus says that when the Greeks had resolved, just before the battle of Salamis, 'to invoke the Aeacidae as allies,' they called on Ajax and Telamon to come to them from Salamis itself, but sent a ship to Aegina to summon 'Aeacus and *the other* Aeacidae' (*i.e.*, Peleus, and his son Achilles; Phocus, and his sons Crisus and Panopeus). The passage has an especial interest as showing that, though Ajax had now been thoroughly adopted into the Aeacid cult of Aegina, this had been done without weakening the immemorial tradition which made Salamis his home.

Another addition to the Ajax legend—worthy of notice, since Aeschylus used it—is that which made the hero invulnerable. This was borrowed from the story of Achilles—which, indeed, influenced at several points the later development of the Ajax-myth: and it served also to connect Ajax with Heracles. In Pindar's fifth Isthmian ode, Heracles, the guest of Telamon at Salamis, prays that his host may have a son, as 'staunch of frame' as the hide of the Nemean lion which he himself is wearing. From some such germ grew the story that Ajax had been born before the arrival of Heracles, who wrapped the child in the lion-skin, making him invulnerable, except in one place which the hide had not covered. This legend is unknown to the *Iliad*; but in Plato's time it was generally current.

§ 5. Aeschylus handled the story of Ajax in a trilogy. The first play was called "Ὅπλων κρίσις", the *Award of the Arms.* Aristotle includes this title (without naming Aeschylus) in a list of ten tragedies of which the subjects were taken from the *Little Iliad*. It would be unsafe to found too much upon this notice. Aristotle may have meant, not a particular tragedy entitled "Ὅπλων κρίσις", but, more generally, that episode, as a tragic subject; thus the contest for the arms was certainly included in the *Ajax* of Theodectes, to which Aristotle more than once alludes in the *Rhetoric* (see below, § 19). We cannot assume, then, that the version given in the *Little Iliad* was that which Aeschylus followed. Welcker thinks that Aeschylus, following the *Aethiopis* of Arctînus, made the Trojan captives the judges, and omitted the onslaught of Ajax on the cattle. As to the judges, it is obvious that tragedy could not use the almost playful romance of the *Little Iliad*, and represent the question as decided by the conversation between the Trojan maidens. One of Welcker's chief reasons for thinking that the captives formed the tribunal is that the "Ὅπλων κρίσις" had a second title, namely, "Φρύγες"—

these 'Phrygians' being the Trojan captives who acted as judges: but this hypothesis as to the second title has no good foundation. On this point, then, we must be content to remark that the Trojans appear as the judges not only in the *Odyssey*, but also in the *Heroica* of Philostratus, in Quintus Smyrnaeus, and in the *Posthomerica* of Tzetzes. Now, after the age of Attic tragedy, the *Aethiopis* of Arctînus, like other Cyclic epics, fell into comparative obscurity, so much of the material having been worked up in the more attractive form of drama. The earliest writer, of known date, who names Arctînus, is Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*circ.* 25 B.C.). It would seem that neither Strabo nor Pausanias knew the *Aethiopis*. When, therefore, Philostratus (*circ.* 235 A.D.), or Quintus Smyrnaeus (*circ.* 450 A.D.), represents the Trojan captives as the judges, it is much less probable that he derived that version from Arctînus than that he found it in some old writer of wider popularity, such as Aeschylus. It is, of course, a bare possibility that these late writers relied solely on the verse in the *Odyssey*; but it is very unlikely. I think, therefore, that Welcker's view on this point has much in its favour, although the ground on which he chiefly rests it (the supposed second title of the play) is untenable. With regard to the general treatment of the subject by Aeschylus, one important fact is certain. Ajax and Odysseus argued their respective claims in speeches—as they do in Ovid and Quintus Smyrnaeus, and as we know that they did in Theodectes. It may perhaps jar somewhat on our conception of Aeschylus—whose style, as we know it, is so remote from rhetoric of the kind which afterwards became popular at Athens—to imagine him pitting his two heroes against each other in controversial speeches; but there is the trial-scene in the *Eumenides* to remind us how he could treat a subject of the forensic type without loss of tragic and heroic elevation. The pleading of his Ajax and his Odysseus had probably more resemblance to a controversy in the *Iliad* than to such an encounter of wits as Euripides would have provided on a similar occasion.

§ 6. The second play of the trilogy was the "Θρῇσσαι". These Thracian women, who formed the Chorus, were captives of Ajax. Tecmessa, in Quintus Smyrnaeus, says that her lord had carried her away from her home, 'along with other women, prizes of war.' The function of this Chorus was similar to that of the Salaminian sailors in Sophocles, to express reverence for Ajax, to mourn with him in his unjust defeat, and especially to sympathise with Tecmessa, a captive like themselves, and one whose lot was to be reduced, by the hero's death, to a level with their own. The suicide of

Ajax was related by a messenger. Aeschylus adopted the legend already mentioned—that Ajax was invulnerable, except at one place (in the side, according to one account), which the lion-hide of Heracles had not covered. The messenger told how, when Ajax first attempted to slay himself, the sword bent against his body, 'as when a man bends a bow.' But anon a divine being came to him: she it was who showed him the place at which he must drive in the sword. The simple fact that the suicide of Ajax was narrated by an eye-witness, who could describe the circumstances attending it, at once indicates how profoundly Aeschylus must have differed from Sophocles in his treatment of this subject. In the psychology of Ajax, as delineated by Sophocles, we can trace the growth of those complex feelings which imperiously required that his deed should be done in complete security from the witness of human eye or ear, so that he might be alone with his deliberate thoughts, and with the gods to whom he speaks them.

§ 7. The place of the "Σαλαμίνιαι" as the third play of this trilogy, and the nature of the subject, may be considered certain. After the death of Ajax, Teucer returns to Salamis, bringing with him the child Eurysaces (confided to his care by Ajax); he is met with reproaches by his father, the aged and lonely Telamon, who blames him for the death of Ajax; and goes forth to found the new Salamis in Cyprus. With regard to the 'Salaminian women'—the Chorus who gave the title to the play—it is well to remember that, when the protagonist of a Greek play is a man (as Teucer here), but the Chorus female, this regularly denotes that a woman has some important, though secondary, part in the action; as Creüsa, for example, in the *Ion*, where the Chorus is formed by her handmaids. The 'Salaminian women' stood (we may conjecture) in a like relation to Eriboea, the mother of Ajax. In the play of Sophocles the Salaminian sailors imagine the passionate grief with which she will hear the evil tidings of her son; and Ajax vividly expresses the same foreboding. It is very possible (I think) that these passages were suggested by the prominent place which the laments of Eriboea and her handmaids held in the *Salaminiae*. 'The island of Ajax,' as Aeschylus calls Salamis, had a cult of the hero, including an annual festival ("Αἰάντεια"); and an impressive conclusion would be given to the trilogy by Telamon decreeing honours to the memory of his son.

§ 8. The award of the arms was not dramatised by Sophocles. In his *Ajax* he assumes, like Pindar, that the award was decided by the Greek chiefs. For

the rest, the outline of his plot is taken from the *Little Iliad.*

The scene is laid before the tent of Ajax, at the eastern end of the Greek camp, on the northern coast of the Troad. The time is early morning. Odysseus is scanning foot-prints on the ground—walking to and fro as he does so, in perplexity. The goddess Athena (who is invisible, probably, to him, though seen by the spectators) speaks to him, and tells him that she can resolve his doubts. Ajax, whom he seeks, is within yonder tent. And Ajax has really done the outrage of which he is suspected: it is he who, in the past night, butchered the oxen and sheep of the Greeks, along with the men in charge of them. His plan had been to murder the Greek chiefs, beginning with the Atreidae; but, just as he had reached their tents, Athena struck him with frenzy, and turned his rage aside upon the cattle. At this moment he is tormenting some of the animals in his tent, fancying that they are the Greek princes. And she will show him to Odysseus. She then calls Ajax to come forth. Odysseus is alarmed at the prospect of being confronted with this raging madman: but the goddess reassures him; the maniac shall not see him.

Then Ajax comes out, with a blood-stained scourge in his hand, and boasts, with wild laughter, of his triumphs. He has killed the Atreidae, and now he is going to flog Odysseus to death. When he returns to his task, Athena reads the moral to her favourite. Let him beware of sinning, through pride, against the gods, as Ajax has done. 'A day can humble all human things, and a day can lift them up; but the wise of heart are loved of the gods, and the evil are abhorred.' Athena then disappears; and Odysseus departs.

The Chorus of Salaminians, followers of Ajax—at once sailors and warriors —now enter. They have heard the rumour that Ajax is the author of the onslaught on the cattle, and are keenly disquieted. If the deed has really been his, he must have been driven to it by some angry deity who demented him. But they rather believe that it is a slander, prompted by the jealousy of the Greek chiefs. He has been too long secluded; let him arise, and clear his good name, which is theirs also.

At this moment Tecmessa comes to them from the tent. She tells them that Ajax has gone mad, and has been slaughtering cattle in the tent. Thus they learn that the worst is true. In the lyric dialogue (kommos) which follows, they learn further that the frenzy of Ajax is past; he is sane again, but is plunged in the deepest despondency. She has just finished a detailed account of what happened in the night—how her lord sallied forth, how he

returned, and how, while tormenting his victims, he conversed with 'some phantom' at the tent-door—when Ajax himself is heard calling from within. She opens the door of the tent (*i.e.*, the interior is disclosed by the eccyclema), and Ajax is seen sitting amidst the slaughtered cattle.

He cries to his trusty friends to slay him; he is disgraced, and has become a mockery to his foes: this shame has blotted out his past deeds. In vain the Chorus and Tecmessa try to comfort him. Each successive utterance makes it clearer that he can think of only one refuge. When at last he has said this plainly—reviewing the whole situation in which he finds himself, and reasoning out the conclusion that nothing remains for him but to die—Tecmessa makes her appeal. Let him think what his death will mean for her and for his child. His only reply is to command that the boy shall be brought to him. This is done; and the touching words which he then speaks (incidentally showing his affection for Tecmessa) are words of farewell. He charges the Chorus with his last injunctions for Teucer, who is to see that his armour is buried with him—saving only the shield which his son Eurysaces (who takes his name from it) is to keep. And Teucer shall take Eurysaces home to Telamon and Eriboea in Salamis. He then sternly commands Tecmessa to retire, with the child. She addresses him with despairing entreaties; but he roughly silences her, and withdraws into the tent.

The Chorus, whose thoughts turn wistfully to Salamis, lament how their hard lot at Troy is now aggravated by this new and dread affliction of their lord. They deplore his cruel fate, and imagine the grief of his aged parents. His plight is indeed such that death might well seem a lesser evil.

Ajax re-enters, with a sword in his hand. He had lately parted from his friends with an open and stern expression of his resolve to die. But now his first words announce at least a change of mood. Time can alter all things; and he has been softened. He is going 'to purge his stains,' and 'to bury' his sword. He wishes 'to avoid' the anger of Athena; and 'henceforth' he will know how to yield to the gods—and to revere the Atreidae. Perhaps they will soon hear that all is well with him.

A discussion of this speech will be found below (§ 12). Its effect is to throw the Chorus into a transport of joy, to which they give vent in song, accompanied by lively dance. So Ajax has been reconciled to the gods, and has forgiven the Atreidae! The trouble is overpast!

A Messenger enters from the Greek camp. Teucer has just returned from a

foray in the Mysian uplands. On his arrival, the infuriated Greeks had thronged around him, denouncing him as 'the kinsman of the maniac,' and threatening to stone him. Meanwhile the Greek chiefs had met in council before Agamemnon's tent. The seer Calchas, drawing apart from their circle, had given a private and friendly warning to Teucer. Ajax, he said, had incurred the anger of Athena, by proud words formerly spoken. But her anger will pursue him *for this day only.* If, during this day, he can be kept within the tent, his life may be saved.

On learning that Ajax has just gone out, the Messenger is filled with dismay, which the Chorus share. They call forth Tecmessa. On hearing what Calchas has said, she implores the Chorus at once to aid her in seeking Ajax. The Chorus now leave the orchestra, in two divisions. One division goes out on the left of the spectators, to search the coast eastward from the camp: the other goes out on the right, to search westwards. Tecmessa also goes forth, and the Messenger departs.

A change of scene now takes place—from the ground in front of the tent, to a lonely spot on the sea-shore, fringed with underwood. (The change of scene in the *Eumenides*, from Delphi to Athens, is the only other certain instance in Greek Tragedy.)

Ajax is seen standing near the sword which he has fixed by its hilt in the ground. He invokes Zeus—to save his corpse from dishonour, by apprising Teucer: Hermes—to give him swift convoy to the nether world: the Furies—to avenge him on the Greeks: Helios—to tell the news in his island-home: Thanatos—to release him. Then he bids farewell to Salamis, to Athens, to the springs, rivers, and plains of Troy: and falls upon his sword.

The Chorus re-enter the orchestra in two bands (as they left it), from opposite sides. They do not see the body of Ajax, which is screened by the underwood amid which it fell. While deploring the failure of their search, they hear a sharp cry of anguish from the copse near them. It is Tecmessa, who has found what they sought. She will not suffer them to see what she has seen, but covers the body with a robe.

Amid the laments which follow, Teucer hastens in: Zeus had heard the prayer of Ajax; 'a swift rumour, as from a god,' had come to the brother. His first thought is for the child that Ajax had bequeathed to his care; and on learning that Eurysaces has been left at the tent, he sends Tecmessa to fetch him. He then unshrouds the corpse; his bitter grief has free course; and as he withdraws the sword from the body which it has transfixed, he

remembers that it was Hector's fatal gift.

Menelaüs now enters, and roughly tells Teucer that the body of Ajax is to remain where it lies, unburied. Ajax was a worse than Trojan foe; he had plotted the murder of his comrades, who were saved only by divine interposition. Reverence for authority shall be upheld: Ajax defied the Atreidae while he lived, but they will dispose of him in death. Teucer replies to the second part of the indictment—the charge of insubordination. Ajax was an independent ally, not a vassal of the Atreidae. In the stormy altercation which follows, Menelaüs has the worst of it, and departs, with a hint that he can bring force to bear.

He has just gone, when Tecmessa comes, with the child Eurysaces, for whom Teucer had sent her to the tent. (Henceforth she is a mute person.) The child is now made to kneel, in the posture of a suppliant, by his father's body, holding in his hand locks of hair (his own, Tecmessa's, and Teucer's), as offerings to the dead. Teucer fears that Menelaüs may seek to separate the kinsfolk from the body of Ajax by force: he therefore places the body under this religious safeguard of a formal 'supplication,' and invokes a solemn curse on any one who may attempt to remove the suppliant by violence. He then goes out, to choose a place for the grave of Ajax.

The Chorus bewail their hardships at Troy. Ajax was once their comfort, and they have lost him. Would that they could pass Sunium, and greet sacred Athens!

Teucer re-enters hurriedly, having noticed the approach of Agamemnon, who appears directly afterwards. Agamemnon reproves the presumption of Teucer ('the captive woman's son'). What, after all, was this Ajax? 'Whither went he, or where stood he, where I was not?' Ajax lost the arms: that is no reason why Teucer should attack the judges. 'Sober thyself, I say—recall thy birth—bring hither someone else—a freeborn man—who shall plead thy cause for thee before us.' Teucer makes a scathing reply. He reminds the king who it was that saved the ships from Trojan fire and sword—who it was that met Hector in single combat. 'Were these deeds not his, who, thou sayest, nowhere set foot where thou wast not?' As to the taunt that he, Teucer, is disqualified by birth for being the champion of Ajax—can the son of Atreus and Aëropè say that to the son of Telamon and Hesionè? With Tecmessa and Eurysaces, he is ready to die in this cause.

At this point—when nothing seems to remain but that the Atreidae should enforce their will—Odysseus enters. He intercedes with Agamemnon, who

is ready to hear 'his best friend.' 'Ajax,' he says, 'was my bitterest foe, after I won the arms': but 'in all our Greek host which came to Troy, I have seen none who was his peer, save Achilles.' Agamemnon argues, wavers, and finally says that, though *he* will always detest Ajax, Odysseus may do as he pleases.

The king having gone, Odysseus proffers friendship to Teucer, and expresses a wish to take part in the obsequies. Teucer warmly thanks him—contrasting his noble conduct with that of the Atreidae. He fears to accept the co-operation of Odysseus in the actual rites, lest that should displease the dead; but will welcome his presence as a spectator, and his help in conciliating the army. Odysseus assents, and withdraws.

Various tasks in relation to the funeral are now assigned to the Chorus by Teucer. He raises the body of the hero, directing the child to lay his hand upon it, that he too may have a part in the office. Then Ajax is carried forth, followed by his wife and his son, with Teucer and the Salaminian warriors, to be laid by the Hellespont in his grave at Cape Rhoeteum, the grave which was to be 'ever memorable among men.'

§ 9. The first question which this play suggests is one which must be considered before any criticism of detail can be profitably attempted—before, indeed, even the character of the hero himself, as drawn by Sophocles, can be properly appreciated. How did the poet conceive the subject of his drama as a whole? What was the nature of the unity which he intended his work to possess? Ajax dies at verse 865: more than a third of the play follows his death, and is concerned with the question as to whether he is, or is not, to be buried. A reader is apt to feel that, with the suicide of Ajax, the principal interest has disappeared. Modern criticism has suggested various apologies for the latter part of the play; the supreme importance which the ancient Greeks attached to funeral rites, as affecting the condition of the departed spirit; the advantage incidental to the controversy between Teucer and the Atreidae, that the merits of Ajax are triumphantly asserted; the edifying victory of prudence and magnanimity in the person of Odysseus. All such considerations, however, tend only to show, first, that this part of the play would have been interesting, on general grounds, to a Greek audience; and secondly, that it is not irrelevant to the subject of the earlier portion. But more than this is required, if the sequel to the hero's death is to be justified as a matter of dramatic art. It has to be explained how the action of the play, from beginning to end, can be regarded as an

organic whole. The idea which pervades it, giving it unity and coherence, must be such that the death of Ajax can be viewed, not as a catastrophe after which everything else becomes tame, but rather as a tragic event necessarily leading to the events which follow it, so that the true climax is reached only in that decision which rescues the corpse of Ajax from dishonour. We must endeavour to trace this idea; or, in other words, to find the point of view from which Sophocles may be supposed to have regarded his own work.

§ 10. The first circumstance which demands notice is the fact that Athena visited Ajax with madness only at the moment when he already stood, in the darkness of night, before the tents of the Atreidae, prepared to murder them in their sleep. He was still sane when he plotted that bloody vengeance against them and the other chiefs. When, after his madness, he regains his sanity, he bitterly laments, at first, that his plan had been foiled. The award of the arms had been unjust. But, none the less, Ajax had merited, by his murderous design, the resentment of the Atreidae and of the Greek army. The public feeling in the camp, on the morning after the outrage, would have fully sustained Agamemnon in visiting him with the extreme penalty which the usage of that age sanctioned in regard to public enemies—the refusal of sepulture. The poet has taken care to let us know this—*before* the death of Ajax—by the mouth of the messenger who brings the warning of Calchas to Teucer. The Greeks, crowding around Teucer, threaten to stone him, guiltless as he is, merely because he is 'the kinsman of the maniac who had plotted against the army.' Ajax himself, in his last speech, forebodes that burial will be refused to him; his only prayer to Zeus is that his body may not be cast to the dogs and birds. The spectators are thus clearly forewarned that, after the fall of Ajax, anger must inevitably break forth against him, menacing him with a calamity more dreadful than death. Hence the intervention of the Atreidae, when it occurs, appears as a necessary consequence of what has preceded. It is the bursting of a storm of which we have seen menacing signs, and even heard the first distant mutterings.

§ 11. As the intervention of the Atreidae has thus a strict coherence with the earlier part of the play, so also the issue which they raise is one which must necessarily be decided, if the earlier action is to reach a dramatic conclusion. For Ajax, at the beginning of the play, has been shown in the

deepest humiliation—a maniac whom Athena exhibits, with his fatuous boasting and his frantic laughter, for the admonition of his successful rival. Yet this Ajax is the same to whom the Athenian spectators, like their fathers before them, had been taught to pay divine honours; the Ajax whose statue they were accustomed to see in the market-place among those of the ten heroes from whom the Attic tribes derived their names—his renown being further commemorated by special distinctions which the tribe Aiantis enjoyed; the ancestor of two families with which the most illustrious Athenians were proud to be linked; the mighty champion who was believed to have been present with the Greeks at Salamis, and who, in the thank-offerings awarded after the victory, was associated with Poseidon and Athena. In following the progress of the play, it would be impossible for Athenians to think of him merely as a great warrior, whose honour had been restored by his resolve to die. They would necessarily think of him also as a sacred 'hero,' in the religious sense of that word. The restoration of his honour would not be complete, in their view, unless, at the end, he appeared as a fitting recipient of the worship which they paid to him. But, for such an end, it was indispensable that he should receive funeral rites. The cult of a 'hero' meant the worship of the spirit of a dead man, who in life had been pre-eminent for great qualities. The first condition of such worship was that the departed spirit should have been duly admitted to the realm of the nether gods by the rendering of funeral rites. The central point in the cult of a 'hero' was his tomb. The offerings at the hero's tomb (or at a 'herôon' which represented it) corresponded, in that cult, with the sacrifices offered to the gods at their altars. The prehistoric tumuli on the shore of the Hellespont, associated with the names of Achilles, Patroclus, and Ajax, were regarded as the monuments which attested that those heroes had received due sepulture, and were, in fact, the primary shrines of their respective cults—honoured, as such, in every age of Greek antiquity. So when an Athenian audience heard the Atreidae insisting that the corpse of Ajax should be 'food for the birds by the sea,' and Teucer insisting that it should be duly buried the interest of the dispute for them did not depend merely on the importance of burial as a condition of peace for *any* departed spirit. The question involved much more than that—viz., the whole claim of Ajax to the sanctity of a 'hero,'—one with which so many traditions of Athens were bound up. The Athenian feeling would be analogous to that of a medieval audience witnessing a drama which concerned the life of a

canonized saint, in which the doubtful issue was whether the powers of evil would succeed in making him commit some sin which would doom his soul beyond the hope of pardon. Such an audience would have followed, with a like depth of interest, the process by which the wiles of the tempter were defeated at the moment when they seemed about to triumph, and the man emerged at the end, notwithstanding weaknesses and lapses, as a worthy object of religious veneration.

These, then, are the grounds on which the dramatic unity of the *Ajax* rests. First, the veto upon the burial of Ajax is an inevitable consequence of his action, and one for which the spectator has been prepared; so that the latter part of the play is not an arbitrary addition to the former, but a natural, indeed a necessary, development of it. Secondly, this veto raises an issue still more momentous, for Athenians, than the question whether Ajax is to live or die; viz., the issue whether he is, or is not, to attain the sanctity of a hero. Hence the true climax of the play is not his death, but the decision that he shall be buried.

§ 12. Consecration as a hero is the goal to which the poet brings Ajax; and this is to be remembered in tracing the mental phases through which he passes. On first recovering his sanity, he gives utterance to bitter lamentation, deploring the triumph of his foes and his own disgrace, and praying for death. Then the resolve to die takes definite shape in his mind: he forms it with full deliberation, after a review of the possible alternatives. He takes farewell of his child, with a stern tenderness both for him and for Tecmessa. He silences her appeals, curtly and roughly—but the very roughness indicates that a struggle is going on within him. Then he retires into the solitude of his tent. After an interval, during which the Chorus chant an ode, he comes forth again, sword in hand, and delivers that speech, which, more than any other passage in the play, has divided the opinions of critics. A correct appreciation of it is, indeed, of the first importance. On the meaning attached to parts of it must depend our conception of the mood in which Sophocles meant Ajax to quit life; and this, in turn, must affect the interpretation of the play as a whole.

He begins thus:

> All things the long and countless years first draw from darkness, then bury from light; and there is nothing for which man may not look; the dread oath is vanquished, and the stubborn will. For even I, erst so

> wondrous firm—yea, as iron hardened in the dipping—felt the keen edge of my temper softened by yon woman's words; and I feel the pity of leaving her a widow with my foes, and the boy an orphan.

It was once the prevalent view that this utterance, like all others in the speech, must be regarded as deliberately designed by Ajax to mislead his hearers, Tecmessa and the Chorus. While he speaks these words, he is still resolved to die: that is certain. It was inferred that he must be grimly ironical when he speaks of having been 'softened,' or of 'feeling pity' at leaving his wife and child. Welcker was the first to maintain—what is unquestionably true—that a change of mood has really taken place in Ajax. He *has* been touched by Tecmessa's pleading; he *does* feel pity. Nor is it necessary to suppose that this change has been abrupt—taking place during his brief seclusion in the tent. Ajax is rugged, imperious and resolute, but not hard of heart: his love for his wife and his child have been hinted already. His words now suggest, indeed, that his new pity will *forbid* him to die. So far—and so far only—they are delusive.

He continues:

> But I will go to the bathing-place and the meadows by the shore, that in purging of my stains I may flee the heavy anger of the goddess. Then I will seek out some untrodden spot, and bury this sword, hatefullest of weapons, digging in the earth where none shall see; no, let Night and Hades keep it underground! For since my hand took this gift from Hector, my worst foe, to this hour I have had no good from the Greeks. Yes, men's proverb is true: *The gifts of enemies are no gifts, and bring no good.*

The words fit his real design. He is indeed going to 'purge his stains'—by death. He will fix his sword in the earth, and 'bury' it—in his body; Night shall 'keep it underground'—in his grave. But is it not manifest that, after his previous reference to the change in his mood, his hearers would necessarily understand these words in their literal sense—as meaning that he would wash off with sea-water the stains left on him by the slaughter of the cattle—would seek to propitiate Athena—and would bury his ill-omened sword in the ground, where it could do no more mischief? This is so evident that it would seem hardly needful to state it, were it not that some eminent critics had maintained a different view. Welcker, followed by Thudichum, and (with some qualifications) by Thirlwall, thinks that Ajax

has no intention to mislead his hearers: he expresses his real purpose, in veiled language, no doubt, but it is their fault that they do not understand him. This view we may unhesitatingly reject. Ajax deliberately deceives his hearers. The art by which he does so, without saying anything that is not verbally true, is so contrived as to give the spectators the kind of pleasure which is felt in guessing a riddle. It would be a mistake to suppose that ancient Greeks would have seen anything unworthy or unheroic in the use of such deception. He is resolved to die, and to die in solitude. He also feels a real tenderness for those whom he is leaving. He cannot part from them in silence; nor, again, can he bring himself to speak openly, and to part from them—as would then be necessary—by force. He therefore veils his farewell so that it is such only to his own mind, not to their apprehension. Greeks would think of this as of a stratagem in war; and the hero would not suffer in their eyes, since the end in view is (as they would think) heroic. Ajax next says:

> Therefore henceforth I shall know how to yield to the gods, and learn to revere the Atreidae. They are rulers, so we must submit. How else? Dread things and things most potent bow to office; thus it is that snowstrewn winter gives place to fruitful summer; and thus night's weary round makes room for day with her white steeds to kindle light; and the breath of dreadful winds can allow the groaning sea to slumber; and, like the rest, almighty Sleep looses whom he has bound, nor holds with a perpetual grasp.
>
> And we—must we not learn discretion? I, at least, will learn it; for I am newly aware that our enemy is to be hated but as one who will hereafter be a friend; and towards a friend I would wish but thus far to show aid and service, as knowing that he will not always abide. For to most men the haven of friendship is false.

Here it is of especial moment to determine how far he is saying what he really means, and how far he is ironical. Is he ironical, to begin with, in saying that he will 'yield to the gods'? When Tecmessa appealed to him in their name, he cried out, in the sharp anguish of the moment, that he owed them no further service (v. 589 f.)—as he had said before that he was 'plainly hateful' to them (v. 457). But, since then, he has been alone for a time with his own thoughts, and (as we have seen) his mood has been changed by pity for those whom he is leaving. If his profession of 'yielding

to the gods' were ironical, his real meaning must be that he defies them: he would be a Capaneus, a Mezentius. But the sense in which he 'yields' to the gods is not merely that he takes a step to which they have driven him, and retires from life: to 'yield,' in that sense, would be merely to accept the inevitable. He 'yields' to the gods in the further sense that he has come to see the folly of the pride in which he formerly despised their help. His words are sad, and are tinged with bitterness; still, they are the proof that he has been chastened by the judgment of Athena, and has learned not 'to think thoughts too high for man.' But what is to be said of his other promise—'to revere the Atreidae'? In his last soliloquy he invokes the Furies to punish them for his wrongs. We might be inclined to say that here, at least, he speaks with bitter irony. And that there is some irony in the form of the phrase, need not be doubted. But then submission to the gods and reverence for the Atreidae are alike enforced by him in the sublime illustration which he draws from the elemental powers of nature. To employ imagery so solemn and so beautiful for the purpose of pointing mere mockery would be incongruous and repulsive. Undoubtedly Sophocles conceived Ajax as really meaning that he would thenceforth 'revere the Atreidae'—in this sense: that he had come to recognise his offence against social order in failing to reverence their station, and to accept the authoritative award of the arms without attempting to exact vengeance. Such a perception would be in no way inconsistent with continued resentment against the Atreidae personally, as unjust men, or with an invocation of divine avengers to smite them. Thus the conversion which Ajax announces in himself is a real one: the element of deception is in his mode of stating it; since, when he says that 'henceforth' he will practise these precepts, he implies, and clearly intends his hearers to understand, that he will continue to live.

The speech ends thus:

> But concerning these things it will be well. Woman, go thou within, and pray to the gods that in all fulness the desires of my heart may be fulfilled. And ye, my friends—honour ye these my wishes even as she doth; and bid Teucer, when he come, have care for me, and good-will towards you withal. For I will go whither I must pass; but do ye what I bid; and ere long, perchance, though now I suffer, ye will hear that I have found peace.

Welcker argues that Ajax cannot have intended to mislead his friends, because this last passage plainly points to death: indeed, he thinks, the poet might even be reproached with some disregard of probability in allowing the Chorus to be deceived by it. It is true that the disguise is thinnest here. But the meaning which hearers would attach to the words would necessarily depend on what had gone before. When the belief that Ajax meant to live had been fixed in their minds by the earlier part of the speech, nothing in this last part could undeceive them.

The foregoing analysis will have shown that I cannot entirely agree with any interpretation of this speech, as a whole, which has hitherto been given. The difficulties which have been felt in it have largely arisen (as it appears to me) from an assumption, express or tacit, that every part of the speech must bear a similar relation to the real thoughts of Ajax. It has been supposed that everywhere he is practising dissimulation; or else that everywhere he is saying what he really means, darkly, indeed, yet without the intention of deceiving. The fact seems to be rather that three distinct threads are subtly interwoven in the texture of the speech; viz., direct expression of his real mind; irony in a form which does not necessarily imply the intention to mislead; and artifice of language so elaborate as necessarily to imply such an intention, at any rate when addressed to simple hearers. While the change of purpose is feigned, the change of mood is real. At his first return to sanity, he had thought of death only as a refuge from disgrace and a recovery of honour. He has now come to view it also as an atonement due to Athena. He recognises the sin of his former over-weening self-confidence. In this sense he dies reconciled to the gods. And that reconciliation has come through the human affections. He had listened to Tecmessa, and parted from his son, without being turned from his resolve, but not without being profoundly moved. The inward workings of pity recalled him to a human standard of feeling, and so revived his sense of human weakness, and of the submission which mortals owe to gods. It was as natural for an ancient Greek to derive fear of the gods from a painful breaking of human ties as it is for Christians to deduce the love of man from the love of God.

§ 13. In the final soliloquy of Ajax, his change of mood is obscured by another sentiment which moderns might think inconsistent with it—viz., his fierce vindictiveness towards those who had given the award of the arms against him (vv. 835 ff.):

> And I call for help to the maidens who live for ever, and ever look on all the woes of men, the dread, far-striding Furies; let them mark how my miserable life is blasted by the Atreidae. And may they overtake those evil men with doom most evil and with utter blight! ... Come, ye swift and vengeful Furies, glut your wrath on all the host, and spare not!

To the ancients, however, such utterances would have seemed perfectly compatible with the altered mood of Ajax. He has come to see that he erred in his over-weening self-reliance; he 'yields to the gods,' and acknowledges that the office of human rulers claims respect: but he also feels implacable resentment for a wrong. 'Benefit thy friends and hurt thy foes,' was the received Greek maxim. Now and again a higher ethical teaching declares that the just man will not knowingly injure any one. But a man might be morally good, in the ordinary Greek view, and also pious ("εὐσεβής"), without accepting that doctrine: Solon, who was esteemed both, prays that he may be 'sweet to his friends and bitter to his foes'; Pindar, a pre-eminently religious poet, who speaks as with the voice of Delphi, expresses a like sentiment. A striking parallel to the case of Ajax here is presented by that of Oedipus at Colonus. Oedipus has found rest and peace at the shrine of the Eumenides; he has been reconciled with the gods; he is already invested with a kind of sanctity; he is on his way—like Ajax—to consecration as a hero: and it is in these circumstances that he utters the appalling imprecations on his sons. Still, in one respect the vindictiveness of Ajax must appear monstrous; he invokes destruction, not only on the chiefs, but on 'all the host.' It can hardly be said that the army at large were involved in the guilt of the award; they had nothing to do with it, and could not prevent or reverse it. A simpler account of the matter seems to be that the punishment of the army is conceived as a further penalty on the chiefs. This would be thoroughly Homeric. Apollo avenges his priest on Agamemnon by plaguing the whole army, just as he might have punished a wicked shepherd by a murrain.

§ 14. Ajax passes, then, reconciled to the gods; and so in a manner suited to that event which is the real end of the play, his accession to the order of worshipped heroes. We may now briefly consider the nature of the divine discipline which he undergoes. The words of the seer Calchas, reported by the Messenger, must be taken as interpreting the poet's conception of it.

Ajax had angered Athena by certain proud words, saying that *he* did not need divine aid in battle. These were casual boasts, in seasons of elation—like that vaunt of Agamemnon, on hitting a stag, which angered Artemis. Ajax was not a bad or impious man; but he showed a pride, too great for a mortal, which required chastisement. Athena chose the moment when a wound to this pride had goaded him into plotting the murder of the chiefs. She struck him with the madness in which he slew the cattle. When the frenzy was past, there settled over him a profound despondency which was also sent by her, being the sequel of her visitation. If (said Calchas) he could only be kept in the tent for that day, all would be well; the anger of Athena would vex him *for that day only*. That is, the despair, which bent his thoughts on suicide, would depart from him on the morrow. He would see that honour did not require his death, since his frenzy had been the judgment of the goddess; cured of his arrogance, he might give new proofs of prudence and valour. But here destiny came in: the message of Calchas arrived too late.

In the opening scene, where Athena holds the dialogue with Ajax and displays his madness, her terrible irony might at first suggest that she is a malignant goddess, exulting in the wretchedness of her victim; but any such impression would be soon corrected by those words of calm majesty in which she points the moral for Odysseus. There is no trace of personal malignity in her attitude towards Ajax. She represents the divine power which judges human arrogance; she corrects it; but she has justly measured the offence, and sets a corresponding limit to her chastisement. It is fated that Ajax shall die; but the shadow of Athena's anger does not rest upon his grave, or trouble the worship which her own people render to him.

§ 15. Odysseus, appearing only at the beginning and at the end of the play, is the human exponent of Athena's spirit. In the first scene he is engaged in a pursuit which the goddess declares to be characteristic of him—the endeavour to track out Ajax, and to ascertain whether he is the author of the onslaught on the cattle. Athena is aiding him, and now, as ever, he is 'guided by her hand.' After witnessing the frenzy of his foe, he at once proves himself her true disciple by the pity which he feels, and by his quickened sense of human nothingness. As Athena says to him, 'The wise of heart are loved of the gods.' At the close of the drama, when he intercedes with Agamemnon, he urges that the career of Ajax must be judged as a whole; that he was their greatest man after Achilles; and that

the enmity against him must not be carried beyond death. Agamemnon yields to him: Teucer praises his magnanimity. Yet this magnanimity bears the mark of being Athena's gift; it springs from high intelligence as much as from chivalrous sentiment. Odysseus may, in his turn, be afflicted by a god; he, too, may come to need a grave; and therefore he sympathises with Ajax. This is 'to think as befits a man,'—the wise moderation which the gods love, and which, though not disinterested, leads to generous action. When Odysseus shrinks from confronting the herculean maniac, this is not 'cowardice'; if Athena calls it so, it is because he forgets her promise to protect him; what it really indicates is his habitual reasonableness and prudence. On the whole, the Odysseus of this play much resembles the hero of the *Odyssey* (who pays a generous tribute to the sullen Ajax in the shades); a resemblance which is mainly due to the direct and ennobling guidance of Athena.

§ 16. The part of Teucer has a singular pathos. He is altogether devoted to his brother Ajax, by whose side he so often fought, and is strenuously loyal to the trust reposed in him. When he arrives, his first thought is for the safety of Eurysaces. With Teucer alone it rests to defend the memory of Ajax, and to insist that he shall have burial. Firm in his good cause, he braves the threats and repels the taunts of the Atreidae. Yet he well knows the prospect that is before him. When he thinks of his return to Salamis, he can foresee the fury with which the aged Telamon will denounce him, the son of the slave-woman, as the base betrayer of his true-born brother. He will be cast off, and driven forth into exile.

The intervention of the Atreidae has already been considered in its general relation to the dominant idea of the play. Their scenes with Teucer now require consideration from a different point of view, viz., with regard to the poetical workmanship. One aim of the poet has evidently been to prolong the controversy sufficiently for a gradual tension of interest. This is especially manifest in the words of the Chorus after the exit of Menelaüs —'A dread strife will be brought to the trial'; words which mark the crescendo, and prepare the way for Agamemnon. The whole process which leads up to the climax is skilfully managed. First, there is the scene between Teucer and Menelaüs. The king of Sparta has those traits of harshness and arrogance which Athenian audiences would expect in the part, and is clearly intended to be more odious than his brother. Though he is not the Captain General—as Teucer reminds him—yet the insubordination of Ajax is the

topic on which he chooses to dwell. Ajax, he complains, would never obey him; and then he enlarges (like Creon in the *Antigone*) on the public danger of unruliness. After his angry dialogue with Teucer, he departs, with a hint of appeal to force. Then comes that beautiful scene which affords a pause between the two parts of the controversy; the child Eurysaces is brought in by Tecmessa, and placed as a suppliant by the corpse of Ajax. In the choral ode which follows, it may be noticed that the closing prayer—to pass beneath Sunium, and 'greet sacred Athens'—is peculiarly suggestive at this point, when Teucer has just encountered the Spartan, and is about to withstand the Argive. The second chapter of the contest then begins with the entrance of Agamemnon. He alone can finally decide whether burial shall or shall not be granted. Whereas Menelaüs had resented the want of deference in Ajax, Agamemnon takes a more vital point, and depreciates his services. This calls forth the fine vindication of Ajax by Teucer, in which the debate culminates. The short dialogue which ensues between Agamemnon and Odysseus shows the former in a comparatively favourable light, and illustrates his superiority to Menelaüs. If he is not gracious or generous, he at least indicates a wish to see his duty, and is capable of yielding to wise counsel. Thus the whole controversy concerning the burial of Ajax has variety, dramatic life, and a gradually rising interest.

To those who further realise that the decision concerning the burial is the true climax of the drama, this part of the play will certainly not appear unworthy of its author. The disfavour which it has sometimes found with modern criticism may be ascribed partly to inadequate appreciation of its poetical art and dramatic significance, but more, perhaps, to the fact that a prolonged rhetorical debate has not the same attraction for modern readers which an ancient Athenian audience found in it. The example of Aeschylus in his *Award of the Arms*, where Ajax and Odysseus spoke in support of their respective claims, may have had some influence in leading Sophocles to compensate for the more restricted scope of his subject by providing a rhetorical interest of a similar kind. A fragment of Aeschylus indicates that his heroes exchanged taunts of the same nature as those which pass between Teucer and the Atreidae. It may be granted that some parts of the scene between Teucer and Menelaüs are wholly repugnant to a modern taste. The best apology for them is that Attic Tragedy was a popular entertainment, and that Athenian hearers not only tolerated but expected sharp personalities in a strenuous debate, however dignified the disputants or the

occasion—as Demosthenes is a witness. But there is no ground for any such suspicion as that of Bergk, that the latter part of the play is by an inferior poet (such as Iophon, the usual scape-goat)—and has been tacked on to an early play of Sophocles, which stopped, or was left unfinished, at the death of Ajax. A careful and sympathetic study will rather leave a conviction on the mind that both the dramatic treatment and the diction bear the stamp of Sophocles, though some of the details are not in his happiest vein, and though the form of the whole—a prolonged controversy—makes a somewhat exacting demand on the modern reader. When the *Ajax* is seen on the stage—and this is the proper test—a modern spectator finds that in the latter part of it the interest is thoroughly sustained. The foreground is full of movement and animation, as Menelaüs, Agamemnon and Odysseus successively appear; while the pathetic group in the background—the child kneeling in supplication by his father's body, with Tecmessa near him—keeps before the mind the significance of the issue which is in suspense. It is then, far more easily than in a mere perusal of the text, that one can view the whole action of the play in a right perspective; and justice is instinctively rendered to the degree in which, here as elsewhere, Sophocles evinces his command over the highest art of the theatre.

§ 17. A few words may suffice to characterise those minor persons of the drama whose principal function is to bring the central figure into relief. Tecmessa, the daughter of a Phrygian prince, whom the fate of war has given to Ajax, loves him with a submissive devotion, and has won from him a constant affection. He is 'her dread lord, of rugged might'; standing to her in the place of country, parents, everything; her only stay and hope on earth. She appreciates his great qualities in their obvious aspects. His laments, in his first despair, affright her, because they seem alien from his nature; but she has no insight into the workings of his mind. She is easily lulled into the belief that he has abandoned the purpose of self-destruction, since the only distinct idea which she had connected with it was that of the misery which it would bring upon her. When her fears are suddenly re-awakened, she bitterly cries that she has been 'deceived.' To her, the one question had been whether the love that he owed her would prevail on him to live; she had no clear perception of any other motives, that might urge him to die; still less could she measure their force. After his death, her simple loyalty refuses to think of him as crushed by his foes. It is no triumph for them, but a blank loss: the victory is rather his: 'All that he yearned to win hath he

made his own—the death for which he longed.' Death was what he desired, and the gods consented; that is all that she understands, beyond the import for herself.

The Salaminians are the staunch followers of Ajax, true to him in weal or woe, and jealous of his good name, which is their own. He turns to them in his misery, as to tried friends, charging them with his last wishes, and with his message to Teucer. But their leading characteristic is their complete dependence on Ajax, and their utter helplessness when his protection is withdrawn. They are dismayed by the anger of the Greeks, and at one moment even think of seeking safety in flight; they bewail the hardships of the camp, and pine for the delights of home. In thus portraying them, the poet probably intended to suggest the Homeric contrast between the passive common folk ("λαοί") and the 'Zeus-nurtured' chiefs. The Salaminians contribute to illustrate the greatness of the hero who had been their 'defence against nightly terror and the darts of the foe'; even their complainings, however unmeet for warriors, serve to recall the weary stress of those ten years at Troy during which Ajax had been the bulwark of the ungrateful Achaeans.

§ 18. The sequel to the story of Ajax was treated by Sophocles in two of his lost plays, the *Teucer* and the *Eurysaces.* The subject of the former is already adumbrated in the *Ajax* (1008—1020): Teucer, on his return to Salamis, is upbraided and expelled by Telamon. A few verses remain from a speech in which the aged king lamented the death of his son—verses of much beauty and pathos, which reveal some gentler traits in the gloomy and choleric Telamon:

> ὡς ἆρ', ὦ τέκνον, κενὴν
> ἐτερπόμην σου τέρψιν εὐλογουμένου
> ὡς ζῶντος: ἡ δ' ἄρ' ἐν σκότῳ λήθουσά με
> ἔσαιν' Ἐρινὺς ἡδοναῖς ἐψευσμένον.

This work is supposed to have been the model of Pacuvius in his tragedy of the same name, from which Cicero quotes part of the passionate reproaches addressed by Telamon to Teucer.

The *Eurysaces* of Sophocles is known only by the citation of a single word from it; but a probable conjecture as to its argument has been based on fragments from the *Eurysaces* of Attius, taken in connection with a passage

of Justin. After his repulse by Telamon, Teucer had founded the new Salamis in Cyprus. On a report of Telamon's death reaching him there, he returned to the old Salamis; but was repelled by Eurysaces, and finally settled among the Gallaeci in the north-west of Spain.

§ 19. An "Αἴας μαινόμενος" is ascribed to Astydamas (*c.* 360 B.C.), the younger of two tragic poets who bore that name. The title suggests a play similar in general scope to that of Sophocles; but nothing is known of it. The "Αἴας" of Carcinus (*c.* 375 B.C.?) is equally unknown. The "Αἴας" of Theodectes (*c.* 330 B.C.) appears to have been more on the lines of Aeschylus; *i.e.*, it contained the "Ὅπλων κρίσις", with speeches by Ajax and Odysseus. That contest appears as a theme for rhetorical prose in the harangues for the two heroes which are ascribed to Antisthenes (*c.* 380 B.C.), and which in any case date probably from the fourth century B.C.

The earliest author of Latin tragedy, the Greek freedman Livius Andronicus, wrote an *Aiax Mastigophorus*, doubtless founded, as the title indicates, on Sophocles. These words occurred in it:

> Praestatur laus virtuti, sed multo ocius
> Verno gelu tabescit:

an echo, probably, of the words in the *Ajax* (vv. 1266 f.),

> φεῦ: τοῦ θανόντος ὡς ταχεῖά τις βροτοῖς
> χάρις διαρρεῖ.

The metaphor of the melting frost (scarcely a happy image for evanescent praise) may have been suggested by "διαρρεῖ". Nothing is known as to the *Aiax* of Ennius, but one of the two verses which remain from it recalls a passage in the *Ajax* of Sophocles. If we may suppose that Ennius, like Livius Andronicus, based his treatment of the subject wholly or mainly on Sophocles, then there is significance in the fact that the later dramatists, Pacuvius and Attius, each wrote an *Armorum Iudicium*; a title which suggests that the desire to vary from their Latin predecessors sent them back to the "Ὅπλων κρίσις" of Aeschylus, and possibly to the play of Theodectes. A fragment from the *Armorum Iudicium* of Attius belongs to the speech in which Odysseus urged his claim to the arms. The verse which Attius has paraphrased from the *Ajax* (vv. 550 f.),

> Virtuti sis par, dispar fortunis patris,

suggests, however, that he may have imitated Sophocles in other details also; perhaps seeking, by such eclecticism of treatment, to distinguish his work from the earlier *Armorum Iudicium* of Pacuvius. The rhetorical capabilities of the subject are illustrated by Ovid, whose powers of brilliant and ingenious declamation are seen to considerable advantage in the speeches of Ajax and Odysseus. His spirited and pointed verse presents a striking contrast to the tame and mechanical treatment of the same episode in the Greek epic of Quintus Smyrnaeus.

The earliest reference in modern literature to the *Ajax* of Sophocles is of sufficient interest to deserve a passing mention here; it occurs in the first scene of *Titus Andronicus*, v. 379:

> The Greeks upon advice did bury Ajax
> That slew himself; and wise Laertes' son
> Did graciously plead for his funerals.

As Steevens saw, these lines must have been written (or prompted) by someone who knew the *Ajax* itself; for no translation of Sophocles existed in the sixteenth century, and the mediation of Odysseus is not mentioned elsewhere. Modern criticism doubts, and with good reason, whether Shakespeare had any part in the *Titus Andronicus*, though Meres, in 1598, included it among his plays: and in this passage, at all events, we seem to see the work of a playwright who had been at one of the Universities.

§ 20. It is interesting to inquire how far the influence of the poets can be traced in such works of Greek art as are concerned with the tragic end of Ajax. A favourite subject was the actual contest for the arms. Some red-figured vases, of the fifth century B.C., show Ajax and Odysseus vehemently disputing the possession of the prize—ready, indeed, to rush at each other, while their friends on either side hold them back: Agamemnon, as judge, stands between them. This type seems to have been created, or at least developed, by the vase-painter. But an earlier form of the same subject occurs on black-figured vases of the sixth century B.C. Here there are only the three principal figures—Ajax, Odysseus, and Agamemnon—and the "ἀγὼν" for the arms approaches still more nearly to the character of a fight. The competitors are advancing against each other with drawn swords, while Agamemnon tries to keep them apart. The black-figured vases prove that the original literary source was not the "Ὅπλων κρίσις" of Aeschylus—as the red-figured vases would have allowed us to suppose—but some older

poem. Other works of art represent the close of the contest. A relief on a sarcophagus found at Ostia shows Odysseus seizing the arms which have just been awarded to him, while Ajax, escorted by indignant friends, is retiring, with visible fury in his eyes—the "ὄμματα ἀστράπτοντα" of the *Iliupersis*. The same moment is depicted on a vase in the British Museum: Athena herself presides over the court, indicating the artist's literal interpretation of the verse in the *Odyssey* (11.547 "παῖδες δὲ Τρώων δίκασαν καὶ Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη"). On a stone in front of the goddess are seen the "ψῆφοι" by which the arms have just been adjudged to Odysseus—a detail which recalls the language of Pindar and Sophocles, who both speak of the award as decided by ballot.

The painters Parrhasius and Timanthes (*c.* 400 B.C.) are said to have competed at Samos in an "ἀγὼν γραφικός", the subject of their pictures being Ajax and Odysseus contending for the arms. But the famous picture on this subject was by Timomachus of Byzantium, whose work was directly inspired by Sophocles. It represented Ajax, as the poet describes him, sitting among the slaughtered cattle, and brooding on self-destruction, in that gloomy despair which followed his frenzy. An epigram in the *Anthology* attests the vivid impression which this picture made on the beholder. It was kindred in conception to another celebrated work of the same painter, Medea meditating the murder of her children. Both pictures were at Cyzicus in the early part of the first century B.C.; they were purchased by Julius Caesar, and placed in the temple of Venus Genetrix at Rome. Ovid in exile remembered both:

> Utque sedet vultu fassus Telamonius iram,
> Inque oculis facinus barbara mater habet

The *Tabula Iliaca* in the Capitoline Museum contains a small picture, inscribed "ΑΙΑΣ ΜΑΝΙΩΔΗΣ", which probably shows the influence of Timomachus; Ajax is seated in an attitude of deep dejection, and near him lies the severed head of a ram—a detail taken from the play of Sophocles (vv. 237 ff.). The hero's suicide is the subject of some Etruscan vase-paintings. One of these shows the sword planted in the ground, as Sophocles describes it (v. 815).

§ 21. The date of the *Ajax* is unknown; but internal evidence affords reasons for believing that, if not the earliest of the seven plays, it is the next oldest

to the *Antigone.*

(1) The Parodos has the form of an anapaestic marching-song (vv. 134—171), followed by a lyric ode (vv. 172—200), as in the *Persae*, the *Supplices*, and the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus. This simplest type of Parodos occurs in no other play of Sophocles, though that of the *Antigone* is akin to it.

(2) Anapaests for the Chorus are interposed in the iambic dialogue (vv. 1163—1167). The only other play of Sophocles in which this occurs is the *Antigone* (vv. 929—943).

These are (I think) the only clear indications of a relatively early date. Some other points, however, have been urged, and demand consideration here.

(3) It has been noted by G. Wolff and others that several words and phrases in the *Ajax* are Aeschylean: e.g. v. 56 "ῥαχίζω" (*Pers.* 426 etc.): 412 "πόροι ἁλίρροθοι" (*Pers.* 367): 447 "φρένες διάστροφοι" (*P. V.* 673): 673 "λευκόπωλος ἡμέρα" (*Pers.* 386): 740 "ὑπεσπανισμένον" (*Pers.* 489 etc.). Again, the epic "ἦ ῥα" (172, *Pers.* 954) occurs also in *Pers.* 633, but not elsewhere in Tragedy; the Doric and epic plural "τοί" (1404), used by Aeschylus (*Pers.* 584 etc.), is not elsewhere used by Sophocles. The *Persae*, it will be seen, furnishes most of these parallelisms. But such coincidences merely show that the *Ajax* belongs to a period when Aeschylus had a strong influence on the younger poet's style; and we have no means of setting an inferior limit to that period. In so far, then, as the language of the play has an Aeschylean stamp, it seems more accurate to say that this characteristic is entirely consonant with the hypothesis of a relatively early date than to claim it as a separate indication of such a date. With regard to the epic "ἦ ῥα" and "τοί", it should be remembered that the play contains several phrases which show a deliberate aim at epic colouring, such as "κλυτῶν ἐνάρων" (177), "ἑλίκεσσι βουσί, κλυτοῖς αἰπολίοις" (374 f.), "οὐλίῳ" (933), "πολύτλας" (954), "κοίλην κάπετον" (1165), which the poet may have deemed appropriate to a subject taken from the Trojan cycle and concerned with a Homeric hero.

(4) Some critics have thought that only twelve choreutae were used in the *Ajax*, and infer that the play belonged to a time when Sophocles had not yet raised the number of the Chorus to fifteen. The chief ground of this theory is the fact that verses 892–914 and 938–960 (taken together) contain twelve utterances of the Chorus. It is assumed that each utterance

represents a single choreutes. But this is an assumption only; and it does not appear a probable one, when it is observed that verses 900–903, and 908–914, are passionate expressions of a feeling common to the whole Chorus, and would naturally, therefore, be given by the whole Chorus. In verses 866–878, again, the attempt to distinguish twelve parts, one for each of twelve choreutae, involves a highly arbitrary process. The mere fact of "ἡμιχόρια" being there employed proves nothing; for the use of hemichoria occurs in plays written at a time when the number of the tragic chorus was certainly fifteen (Eur. *Or*. 1258 ff., Eur. *Alc*. 93–111, Eur. *Alc*. 226–232).

(5) Lastly, it has been supposed that the play was written 'not long after the introduction of a third actor,' because three actors are on the scene together only in the prologue (Athena, Odysseus, Ajax), and at the end (Agamemnon, Teucer, Odysseus); Odysseus being silent while Ajax is present (92–117), and Teucer while Agamemnon is present (1318–1373). But it appears very unsafe to assume that these facts indicate an early and tentative stage in the use of the third actor. They may be due simply to the construction of the play and to the requirements of each dramatic situation.

As between the *Ajax* and the *Antigone*, the claim to priority would rest with the *Ajax*, if the form of the Parodos were the test; though the Parodos of the *Antigone* is also of an early type (see n. on *Ai*. 134). But much more weight is due to the fact that the *Antigone*, alone of the seven plays, rigorously adheres to the practice of Aeschylus, in never admitting the division of an iambic trimeter between two or more speakers ("ἀντιλαβή"). This was no trivial detail, but a general rule of composition which materially affected the character of dialogue. When Sophocles at last decided to relax that rule, the result was a marked gain in lightness and rapidity at moments when the dialogue became animated or excited. The fact that he had made this change before he wrote the *Ajax* seems clearly to indicate that the *Ajax* is later than the *Antigone.*

§ 22. Aristotle's work called "Διδασκαλίαι" was a chronological list of tragedies and comedies produced at Athens, the list being based on official records contemporary in each case with the production. Similar works were afterwards compiled by Callimachus (c. 260 B.C.) and others. The "Διδασκαλίαι" of Aristotle and of Callimachus are known to have been still

extant in the second century A.D., we learn from the Greek Argument to the *Ajax* that 'in the Didascaliae' the play was styled simply "ΑΙΑΣ". This is conclusive as to the original title; since, whether the Didascaliae meant, be Aristotle's, or one of the later works, in any case the ultimate authority for the statement dates from the time when the play was produced. In the extant manuscripts the title is "Αἴας Μαστιγοφόρος" (alluding to the lash which Ajax carries in the first scene); as it is also in the citations by Zenobius (c. 130 A.D.), Athenaeus, and Clement of Alexandria. On the other hand, the Greek Argument states that Dicaearchus (a pupil of Aristotle) called the play "Αἴαντος Θάνατος", which he could scarcely have done if the title "Αἴας Μαστιγοφόρος" had already obtained currency. We may infer from these facts that the epithet "Μαστιγοφόρος" was added by some Alexandrian scholar whose authority sufficed to establish it as a permanent part of the title. If the object had been merely, as the author of the Argument suggests, to distinguish the play from the "Αἴας Λοκρός" of Sophocles, "Τελαμώνιος" might have seemed a fitter designation; but doubtless the intention was rather to distinguish it from later dramas on the same subject, such as those of Astydamas, Carcinus and Theodectes.

AJAX

Persons of the Drama

Athena

Ajax

Odysseus

Tecmessa

Teucer

Menelaus

Agamemnon

Chorus of Salaminian Sailors

Mute Persons

The child Eurysaces and his attendant

Two heralds, accompanying Menelaus

Two bodyguards, in attendance on Agamemnon

Attendants of Teucer

Scene: (1) At first, before the tent of Ajax, at the eastern end of the Greek camp, near Cape Rhoeteum on the northern coast of the Troad. (2) After verse 814, a lonely place on the shore of the Hellespont, with underwood or bushes.

After the death of Achilles in the war at Troy, Ajax and Odysseus were rivals for the honour of inheriting his armour. The Greek chiefs, with the two Atreidae at their head, were the judges; and they awarded the prize to Odysseus. Distempered in mind by his rejection, Ajax went out at night with the purpose of slaying Agamemnon and Menelaus. He was at the very doors of their quarters, when Athena, whom he had angered in past days, smote him with raging madness. He fell on the flocks and herds of the Greek army, fancying that they were his human foes; cut down the shepherds and herdsmen, slaughtered numbers of the animals, and led others captive to his tent.

When the drama begins, it is early on the morning after this midnight raid. Rumour already points to the son of Telamon as the author of the outrage. Odysseus, acting on the hint of an informant who had caught a glimpse of the maniac, has followed up the tracks which he found in the plain; and these have led him to the tent of Ajax. He is now closely scanning the footprints near it, in order to judge whether Ajax is still within the tent, or has again gone forth. While thus engaged, he hears the voice of his guardian goddess.

Athena

Ever have I seen thee, son of Laertius, seeking to snatch some occasion against thy foes; and now at the tent of Ajax by the ships, where he hath his station at the camp's utmost verge, I see thee long while pausing on his trail and scanning his fresh tracks, to find whether he is within or abroad. Well doth it lead thee to thy goal, thy course keen-scenting as a Laconian hound's. For the man is even now gone within, sweat streaming from his face and from hands that have slain with the sword. And there is no further need for thee to peer within these doors; but say what is thine aim in this eager quest, that thou mayest learn from her who can give thee light.

Odysseus

Voice of Athena, dearest to me of the Immortals, how clearly, though thou be unseen, do I hear thy call and seize it in my soul, as when a

Tyrrhenian clarion speaks from mouth of bronze! And now thou hast discerned aright that I am hunting to and fro on the trail of a foeman, even Ajax of the mighty shield. 'Tis he, and no other, that I have been tracking so long.

This night he hath done to us a thing which passes thought—if he is indeed the doer; for we know nothing certain, but drift in doubt; and I took upon me the burden of this search. We have lately found the cattle, our spoil, dead—yea, slaughtered by human hand—and dead, beside them, the guardians of the flock.

Now, all men lay this crime to him. And a scout who had descried him bounding alone over the plain with reeking sword brought me tidings, and declared the matter. Then straightway I rushed upon his track; and sometimes I recognise the footprints as his, but sometimes I am bewildered, and cannot read whose they are. Thy succour is timely; thine is the hand that ever guides my course—as in the past, so for the days to come.

Athena

I know it, Odysseus, and came early on the path, a watcher friendly to thy chase.

Odysseus

Dear mistress, do I toil to purpose?

Athena

Know that yon man is the doer of these deeds.

Odysseus

And why was his insensate hand put forth so fiercely?

Athena

In bitter wrath touching the arms of Achilles.

Odysseus

Why, then, this furious onslaught upon the flocks?

Athena

'Twas in your blood, as he deemed, that he was dyeing his hand.

Odysseus

What? Was this design aimed against the Greeks?

Athena

He would have accomplished it, too, had I been careless.

Odysseus

And how had he laid these bold plans? What could inspire such hardihood?

Athena

In the night he went forth against you, by stealth, and alone.

Odysseus

And did he come near us? Did he reach his goal?

Athena

He was already at the doors of the two chiefs.

Odysseus

What cause, then, stayed his eager hand from murder?

Athena

I, even I, withheld him, for I cast upon his eyes the tyrannous fancies of his baneful joy; and I turned his fury aside on the flocks of sheep, and the confused droves guarded of herdsmen, the spoil which ye had not yet divided. Then he fell on, and dealt death among the horny throng, as he hewed them to the earth around him; and now he deemed that the two Atreidae were the prisoners whom he slew with his hand, now 'twas this chief, now 'twas that, at each new onset. And while the man raved in the throes of frenzy, I still urged him, hurled him into the toils of doom. Anon, when he rested from this work, he bound together the living oxen, with all the sheep, and brought them home, as though his captives were men, not goodly kine. And now he torments them, bound together, in the house.

But to thee also will I show this madness openly, that when thou hast seen it thou mayest proclaim it to all the Greeks. And be thou steadfast and of a good courage, nor look for evil from the man; for I will turn away the vision of his eyes, and keep them from beholding thy face.

Ho, thou who art binding with cords the back-bent arms of thy captives, I call thee, come hither! Ajax, what ho! come forth from the house!

Odysseus

What dost thou, Athena? Never call him forth.

Athena

Hold thy peace! Do not earn the name of coward!

Odysseus
Forbear, I pray thee; be content that he stay within.

Athena
What is the danger? Was he not a man before?

Odysseus
Yea, a foeman to thy servant, and still is.

Athena
And to mock at foes—is not that the sweetest mockery?

Odysseus
Enough for me that he abide within his doors.

Athena
Thou fearest to see a madman in full view?

Odysseus
No fear had made me shun him, if he were sane.

Athena
Nay, even now, he shall not see thee, though thou art near.

Odysseus
How so, if he still sees with the same eyes?

Athena
I will darken them, though they are open.

Odysseus
Well, all is possible when a god contrives.

Athena
Stand silent, then, and stay where thou art.

Odysseus
I must stay. Would that I were far from here!

Athena
What ho, Ajax, once again I call thee! is this thy scanty regard for thine ally?

Enter Ajax, *holding a blood-stained scourge in his hand.*

Ajax
Hail, Athena! Hail, Zeus-born maid! How well hast thou *stood* by me! Yea, I will crown thy shrine with trophies of pure gold for this prize!

ATHENA
'Tis fairly spoken. But tell me this—hast thou dyed thy sword well in the Greek camp?

AJAX
That vaunt is mine; I disclaim it not.

ATHENA
And perchance turned thine armed hand on the Atreidae?

AJAX
So that nevermore will they dishonour Ajax.

ATHENA
The men are dead, as I take thy meaning:

AJAX
Dead: now let them rob me of my arms!

ATHENA
Good: and then the son of Laertius—in what plight hast thou left him? Hath he escaped thee?

AJAX
What, thou askest me of that accursed fox?

ATHENA
Yea, in sooth—of Odysseus, thine adversary.

AJAX
No guest so welcome, Lady: he is sitting in the house—in bonds: I do not mean him to die just yet.

ATHENA
What wouldst thou do first? What larger advantage wouldst thou win?

AJAX
First, he shall be bound to a pillar beneath my roof—

ATHENA
The hapless man—what despite wilt thou do unto him?

AJAX
—and have his back crimsoned with the scourge, ere he die.

ATHENA
Nay, do not torture the wretch so cruelly.

AJAX

In all else, Athena, I say, have thy will; but his doom shall be none but this.

ATHENA

Nay, then, since it delights thee to do thus, hold not thy hand, abate no jot of thine intent.

AJAX

I go to my work—but thou, I charge thee, stand ever at my side as thou hast stood to-day!

Exit AJAX.

ATHENA

Seest thou, Odysseus, how great is the strength of the gods? Whom couldest thou have found more prudent than this man, or more valiant for the service of the time?

ODYSSEUS

I know none; and I pity him in his misery, for all that he is my foe, because he is bound fast to a dread doom: I think of mine own lot no less than his. For I see that we are but phantoms, all we who live, or fleeting shadows.

ATHENA

Therefore, beholding such things, look that thine own lips never speak a haughty word against the gods, and assume no swelling port, if thou prevailest above another in prowess or by store of ample wealth. For a day can humble all human things, and a day can lift them up; but the wise of heart are loved of the gods, and the evil are abhorred.

Enter the CHORUS *of Salaminian Sailors, followers of Ajax.*

CHORUS

Son of Telamon, thou whose wave-girt Salamis is firmly throned upon the sea, when thy fortunes are fair, I rejoice: but when the stroke of Zeus comes on thee, or the angry rumour of the Danai with noise of evil tongues, then I quake exceedingly and am sore afraid, like a winged dove with troubled eye.

And so, telling of the night now spent, loud murmurs beset us for our shame; telling how thou didst visit the meadow wild with steeds, and didst destroy the cattle of the Greeks, their spoil—prizes of the spear

which had not yet been shared—slaying them with flashing sword.

Such are the whispered slanders that Odysseus breathes into all ears; and he wins large belief. For now the tale that he tells of thee is specious; and each hearer rejoices more than he who told, despitefully exulting in thy woes.

Yea, point thine arrow at a noble spirit, and thou shalt not miss; but should a man speak such things against me, he would win no faith. 'Tis on the powerful that envy creeps. Yet the small without the great can ill be trusted to guard the walls; lowly leagued with great will prosper best, great served by less.

But foolish men cannot be led to learn these truths. Even such are the men who rail against thee, and we are helpless to repel these charges, without thee, O king. Verily, when they have escaped thine eye, they chatter like flocking birds: but, terrified by the mighty vulture, suddenly, perchance—if thou shouldst appear—they will cower still and dumb.

Strophe—

Was it the Tauric Artemis, child of Zeus, that drave thee—O dread rumour, parent of my shame! against the herds of all our host—in revenge, I ween, for a victory that had paid no tribute, whether it was that she had been disappointed of glorious spoil, or because a stag had been slain without a thank-offering? Or can it have been the mail-clad Lord of War that was wroth for dishonour to his aiding spear, and took vengeance by nightly wiles?

Antistrophe—

Never of thine own heart, son of Telamon, wouldst thou have gone so far astray as to fall upon the flocks. Yea, when the gods send madness, it must come; but may Zeus and Phoebus avert the evil rumour of the Greeks!

And if the great chiefs charge thee falsely in the furtive rumours which they spread, or sons of the wicked line of Sisyphus, forbear, O my king, forbear to win me an evil name, by still keeping thy face thus hidden in the tent by the sea.

Epode—

Nay, up from thy seat, wheresoever thou art brooding in this pause of many days from battle, making the flame of mischief blaze up to heaven! But the insolence of thy foes goes abroad without fear in the breezy glens, while all men mock with taunts most grievous; and my sorrow passes not

away.

Enter Tecmessa.

Tecmessa

Mariners of Ajax, of the race that springs from the Erechtheidae, sons of the soil—mourning is our portion who care for the house of Telamon afar. Ajax, our dread lord of rugged might, now lies stricken with a storm that darkens the soul.

Chorus

And what is the heavy change from the fortune of yesterday which this night hath brought forth? Daughter of the Phrygian Teleutas, speak: for to thee, his spear-won bride, bold Ajax hath borne a constant love; therefore mightest thou hint the answer with knowledge.

Tecmessa

Oh, how shall I tell a tale too dire for words? Terrible as death is the hap which thou must hear. Seized with madness in the night, our glorious Ajax hath been utterly undone. For token, thou mayest see within his dwelling the butchered victims weltering in their blood, sacrifices of no hand but his.

Strophe—

Chorus

What tidings of the fiery warrior hast thou told, not to be borne, nor yet escaped—tidings which the mighty Danai noise abroad, which their strong rumour spreads! Woe is me, I dread the doom to come: shamed before all eyes, the man will die, if his frenzied hand hath slain with dark sword the herds and the horse-guiding herdsmen.

Tecmessa

Alas! 'twas thence, then—from those pastures—that he came to me with his captive flock! Of part, he cut the throats on the floor within; some, hewing their sides, he rent asunder. Then he caught up two white-footed rams; he sheared off the head of one, and the tongue-tip, and flung them away; the other he bound upright to a pillar, and seized a heavy thong of horse-gear, and flogged with shrill, doubled lash, while he uttered revilings which a god, and no mortal, had taught.

Antistrophe—

Chorus

The time hath come for each of us to veil his head and betake him to stealthy speed of foot, or to sit on the bench at the quick oar, and give her way to the sea-faring ship. Such angry threats are hurled against us by the brother-kings, the sons of Atreus: I fear to share a bitter death by stoning, smitten at this man's side, who is swayed by a fate to which none may draw nigh.

Tecmessa

It sways him no longer: the lightnings flash no more; like a southern gale, fierce in its first onset, his rage abates; and now, in his right mind, he hath new pain. To look on self-wrought woes, when no other hath had a hand therein—this lays sharp pangs to the soul.

Chorus

Nay, if his frenzy hath ceased, I have good hope that all may yet be well: the trouble is of less account when once 'tis past.

Tecmessa

And which, were the choice given thee, wouldst thou choose—to pain thy friends, and have delights thyself, or to share the grief of friends who grieve?

Chorus

The twofold sorrow, lady, is the greater ill.

Tecmessa

Then are we losers now, although the plague is past.

Chorus

What is thy meaning? I know not how thou meanest.

Tecmessa

Yon man, while frenzied, found his own joy in the dire fantasies that held him, though his presence was grievous to us who were sane; but now, since he hath had pause and respite from the plague, he is utterly afflicted with sore grief, and we likewise, no less than before. Have we not here two sorrows, instead of one?

Chorus

Yea verily: and I fear lest the stroke of a god hath fallen. How else, if his spirit is no lighter, now that the malady is overpast, than when it vexed him?

Tecmessa

Thus stands the matter, be well assured.

Chorus

And in what wise did the plague first swoop upon him? Declare to us, who share thy pain, how it befell.

Tecmessa

Thou shalt hear all that chanced, as one who hath part therein. At dead of night, when the evening lamps no longer burned, he seized a two-edged sword, and was fain to go forth on an aimless path. Then I chid him, and said; 'What dost thou, Ajax? why wouldst thou make this sally unsummoned—not called by messenger, not warned by trumpet? Nay, at present the whole army sleeps.'

But he answered me in curt phrase and trite: 'Woman, silence graces women.' And I, thus taught, desisted; but he rushed forth alone. What happened abroad, I cannot tell: but he came in with his captives bound together—bulls, shepherd dogs, and fleecy prisoners. Some he beheaded; of some, he cut the back-bent throat, or cleft the chine; others, in their bonds, he tormented as though they were men, with onslaughts on the cattle.

At last, he darted forward through the door, and began ranting to some creature of his brain—now against the Atreidae, now about Odysseus—with many a mocking vaunt of all the despite that he had wreaked on them in his raid. Anon, he rushed back once more into the house; and then, by slow, painful steps, regained his reason.

And as his gaze ranged over the room full of his wild work, he struck his head, and uttered a great cry: he fell down, a wreck amid the wrecks of the slaughtered sheep, and there he sat, with clenched nails tightly clutching his hair. At first, and for a long while, he sat dumb: then he threatened me with those dreadful threats, if I declared not all the chance that had befallen; and asked in what strange plight he stood. And I, friends, in my fear, told all that had been done, so far as I surely knew it. But he straightway broke into bitter lamentations, such as never had I heard from him before. For he had ever taught that such wailing was for craven and low-hearted men; no cry of shrill complaint would pass his lips; only a deep sound, as of a moaning bull.

But now, prostrate in his utter woe, tasting not of food or drink, the man

sits quiet where he has fallen, amidst the sword-slain cattle. And plainly he yearns to do some dread deed: there is some such meaning in his words and his laments. Ah, my friends—indeed, this was my errand—come in and help, if in any wise ye can. Men in his case can be won by the words of friends.

CHORUS

Tecmessa, daughter of Teleutas, dread are thy tidings, that our lord hath been frenzied by his sorrows.

AJAX

(*within*). Woe, woe is me!

TECMESSA

Soon there will be worse, belike. Heard ye not Ajax—heard ye not that resounding cry?

AJAX

Woe, woe is me!

CHORUS

The man seems to be distempered, or else to be grieving for the distempers which lately vexed him, when he sees their work.

AJAX

O my son, my son!

TECMESSA

Ah me! Eurysaces, 'tis for thee he calls! What can be his purpose? Where art thou? Unhappy that I am!

AJAX

Ho, Teucer! Where is Teucer? Will his foray last for ever? And I perish!

CHORUS

He seems to be sane. Come, open there! open—perchance e'en at the sight of me he may come to a more sober mood.

TECMESSA

Behold, I open: thou canst look on yon man's deeds, and his own plight.

AJAX *is discovered sitting amidst the slaughtered cattle.*

Strophe 1—

AJAX

Alas, good sailors, alone of my friends, alone still constant to your loyalty, behold what a wave hath but now surged around me and hemmed me in, under stress of a deadly storm!

Chorus

Ah, lady, how sadly true seems thy report! The fact proves that no sane mind is here.

Antistrophe 1—

Ajax

Alas, ye mates staunch in sea-craft, ye who manned the ship and made the oar-blade flash upon the brine—in you, in you alone I see a defence against misery: come, slay me also!

Chorus

Hush thy wild lips: cure not ill by ill, nor increase the anguish of the doom.

Strophe 2—

Ajax

Seest thou the bold, the strong of heart, the dauntless in battles with the foe—seest thou how I have shown my prowess on creatures that feared no harm? Alas, the mockery! How then have I been shamed!

Tecmessa

Ajax, my lord, I implore thee, speak not thus!

Ajax

Hence! out with thee! avaunt—begone! Woe is me! woe is me!

Chorus

For the gods' love, yield to counsel, and learn wisdom!

Ajax

Wretch that I am, who suffered the accursed men to slip through my hands, but fell on horned kine and goodly flocks, and made their dark blood flow!

Chorus

Why grieve when the deed is past recall? These things can never be but as they are.

Antistrophe 2—

Ajax

Ah, thou who watchest all things, thou ready tool of every crime, ah, son of Lartius, thou foulest knave in all the host, I warrant thou laughest loud and long for joy!

Chorus

As the god gives, so every man laughs or mourns.

Ajax

Yet would that I could see him, shattered though I am! Ah me, ah me!

Chorus

Speak no proud word: seest thou not to what a plight thou hast come?

Ajax

O Zeus, father of my sires, would that I might slay that deep dissembler, that hateful knave, and the two brother-chiefs, and lastly die myself also!

Tecmessa

When thou makest that prayer, pray therewith for me also that I die: wherefore should I live when thou art dead?

Strophe 3—

Ajax

Alas, thou darkness, my sole light! O thou nether gloom, fairer for me than any sunshine! take me to dwell with you—yea, take me; for I am no longer worthy to look for help to the race of the gods, or for any good from men, the children of a day.

No, the daughter of Zeus, the strong goddess, torments me to the death. Whither then shall a man flee? Whither shall I go to find rest? If my past fame is destroyed, my friends, along with such victims as these near me—if I have set myself to win a madman's triumphs, and all the host, with sword uplifted in both hands, would strike me dead!

Tecmessa

Ah me unhappy, that a good man and true should utter such words—words that, till now, he ne'er would have deigned to speak!

Antistrophe 3—

Ajax

Alas, ye paths of the sounding wave, ye sea-caves and wooded pastures by the shore, long time, long time and very weary have ye known me tarrying at Troy; but no more shall ye know me—no more with the breath of life:

of so much let sane men be sure.

Ah, streams of Scamander near us, kindly to the Greeks, never shall ye look on Ajax more; whose peer in the host—for I will utter a proud word—never hath Troy seen come from the land of Hellas: but now, behold, he hath been humbled to the dust!

Chorus

In sooth I know not how to restrain thee, or how suffer thee to speak, whom woes so grievous have befallen.

Ajax

Ay me! Who could e'er have thought that my name would chime so meetly with my doom? For well may I now mourn—yea, twice and three times mourn—in those sad syllables that shape my name; such heavy griefs are mine, whose sire by his prowess won the fairest prize of all the host, and brought all glory home from this land of Ida; but I his son, who came after him in might not less to this same ground of Troy, and proved the service of mine hand in no meaner deeds, thus perish, dishonoured of the Greeks. Yet, methinks, of thus much am I sure; if Achilles lived, and had been called to decree the first place in valour to any claimant of his arms, no one would have grasped them before me. But now the Atreidae have conveyed them to a villain, and thrust away the high deeds of Ajax.

And if these eyes, if this warped mind had not swerved from the purpose that was mine, never would they have procured such a judgment against another man. As it was, the daughter of Zeus, the fierce-eyed, unconquerable goddess, foiled me at the instant when I was making ready my hand against them—struck me with a plague of frenzy—made me imbrue my hands in the blood of these poor cattle. And yon men exult to have escaped me—by no good-will of mine; but if a god send harm, verily e'en the base man can elude the worthier.

And now what shall I do; who plainly am hateful to the gods, abhorred by the Greek host, hated by all Troy and all these plains? Shall I forsake the station of the ships, and leave the Atreidae forlorn, and go homeward across the Aegean? And what face shall I show to my father when I come—to Telamon? How will he find heart to look on me, when I stand before him ungraced—without that meed of valour whereby *he* won a great crown of fame? 'Tis not to be endured.

But then shall I go to the stronghold of the Trojans—attack alone, where

all are foes—and, in doing some good service, lastly die? Nay, thus I might haply gladden the Atreidae. It must not be. Some emprise must be sought whereby I may prove to mine aged sire that in heart, at least, his son is not a dastard.

'Tis base for a man to crave the full term of life, who finds no varying in his woes. What joy is there in day following day—now pushing us forward, now drawing us back, on the verge—of death? I rate that man as nothing worth, who feels the glow of idle hopes. Nay, one of generous strain should nobly live, or forthwith nobly die: thou hast heard all.

Chorus

No man shall say that thou hast spoken a bastard word, Ajax, or one not bred of thy true soul. Yet forbear: dismiss these thoughts, and suffer friends to overrule thy purpose.

Tecmessa

Ajax, my lord, the doom given by fate is the hardest of evils among men. I was the daughter of a free-born sire, wealthy and mighty, if any Phrygian was; and now I am a slave: for so the gods ordained, I ween, and chiefly thy strong hand. Therefore, since wedlock hath made me thine, I wish thee well; and I do entreat thee, by the Zeus of our hearth, by the marriage that hath made us one, doom me not to the cruel rumour of thy foes—abandon me not to the hand of a stranger! On what day soever thou die and leave me lonely by thy death, on that same day, be sure, I also shall be seized forcibly by the Greeks, and, with thy son, shall have the portion of a slave. Then shall some one of my masters name me in bitter phrase, with keen taunts: 'See the concubine of Ajax, his, who was the mightiest of the host; see what menial tasks are hers, who had such bliss!' Thus shall men speak; and destiny will afflict me; but these words will be shameful for thee and for thy race.

Nay, have thought for thy father, whom thou forsakest in a drear old age; for thy mother—and hers are many years—who oft prays to the gods that thou come home alive; and pity, O king, thy son, if, bereft of fostering care, he must spend his days forlorn of thee, the ward of unloving guardians; think how great is this sorrow, which at thy death thou wilt bequeath to him and me.

I have nothing left whereunto I can look, save thee. Thou didst ravage my country with the spear, and another doom hath laid low my mother and

my sire, that they should dwell with Hades in their death. What home, then, could I find, if I lost thee? What wealth? On thee hangs all my welfare. Nay, have thought for me also: a true man should cherish remembrance, if anywhere he reap a joy. 'Tis kindness that still begets kindness. But whosoever suffers the memory of benefits to slip from him, that man can no more rank as noble.

Chorus

Ajax, I would that pity touched thy soul as it doth mine: so wouldst thou approve her words.

Ajax

Verily she shall have approval on my part, if only she take heart to do my bidding well.

Tecmessa

Nay, dear Ajax, I will obey in all things.

Ajax

Then bring me my son, that I may see him.

Tecmessa

Oh, but in those fears I released him from my keeping.

Ajax

During these troubles of mine? Or what meanest thou?

Tecmessa

Yea, lest haply the poor child should meet thee, and die.

Ajax

Aye truly, that would have been worthy of my fortune.

Tecmessa

Well, at least I was watchful to avert *that* woe.

Ajax

I praise thy deed, and the foresight which thou hast shown.

Tecmessa

How, then, can I serve thee, as the case stands now?

Ajax

Let me speak to him, and see him face to face.

Tecmessa

Oh yes—he is close by, in charge of attendants.

AJAX

Then wherefore is his coming delayed?

TECMESSA

My child, thy father calls thee. Bring him hither, servant, whosoever of you is guiding his steps.

AJAX

Comes the man at thy call? Or hath he failed to hear thy words?

TECMESSA

Even now one of the servants there draws near with him.

Enter ATTENDANT *with* EURYSACES.

AJAX

Lift him, lift him to mine arms. He will feel no dread, I ween, in looking on this newly shed blood, if he is indeed my true-born son. But he must at once be broken into his father's rugged ways, and moulded to the likeness of his nature. Ah, boy, mayest thou prove happier than thy sire, but in all else like him; and thou wilt prove not base. Yet even now I may well envy thee for this, that thou hast no sense of these ills. Yea, life is sweetest before the feelings are awake, [for lack of feeling is a painless ill,]—until one learns to know joy or pain. But when thou shalt come unto that knowledge, then must thou see to prove among thy father's foes of what mettle and what sire thou art.

Meanwhile feed on light breezes, and nurse thy tender life, for this thy mother's joy. No fear, I wot, lest any of the Greeks assail thee with cruel outrage, even when thou hast me no more. So trusty is the warder whom I will leave to guard thee, even Teucer; who will not falter in his care for thee, albeit now he is following a far path, busied with chase of foes.

O my warriors, seafaring comrades! On you, as on him, I lay this task of love; and give ye my behest to Teucer, that he take this child to mine own home, and set him before the face of Telamon, and of my mother, Eriboea, that so he may prove the comfort of their age evermore [until they come unto the deep places of the nether god]. And charge him that no stewards of games, nor he who worked my ruin, make mine arms a prize for the Greeks. No—*this* take thou, my son—the broad shield from which thou hast thy name—hold and wield it by the well-wrought thong,

that sevenfold, spear-proof targe! But the rest of my armour shall be buried in my grave.

(*To* Tecmessa.) Come, tarry not; take the child straightway, make fast the doors, and utter no laments before the house: in sooth a woman is a plaintive thing. Quick, close the house! It is not for a skilful leech to whine charms over a sore that craves the knife.

Chorus

I am afraid when I mark this eager haste: I like not the keen edge of thy speech.

Tecmessa

Ajax, my lord, on what deed can thy mind be set?

Ajax

Ask not, inquire not; 'tis good to be discreet.

Tecmessa

Ah, my heavy heart! Now, by thy child—by the gods—I implore thee, be not guilty of forsaking us!

Ajax

Nay, thou vexest me over much: knowest thou not that I no longer owe aught of service to the gods?

Tecmessa

Hush, hush!

Ajax

Speak to those who hear.

Tecmessa

And wilt *thou* not hearken?

Ajax

Already thy words have been too many.

Tecmessa

I am afraid, O prince! Ajax

(*To the Attendants*.) Close the doors, I say, this instant!

Tecmessa

For the gods' love, be softened!

Ajax

'Tis a foolish hope, methinks, if thou wouldst begin now to school my

temper.

AJAX *is shut into the tent.* — *Exit* TECMESSA *with* EURYSACES.

Strophe 1—

CHORUS

O famous Salamis, thou, I ween, hast thy happy seat among the waves that lash thy shore, the joy of all men's eyes for ever; but I, hapless, have long been tarrying here, still making my couch, through countless months, in the camp on the fields of Ida—worn by time, and darkly looking for the day when I shall pass to Hades, the abhorred, the unseen.

Antistrophe 1—

And now I must wrestle with a new grief, woe is me! the incurable malady of Ajax, visited by a heaven-sent frenzy; whom in a bygone day thou sentest forth from thee, mighty in bold war; but now, a changed man who nurses lonely thoughts, he hath been found a heavy sorrow to his friends. And the former deeds of his hands, deeds of prowess supreme, have fallen dead, nor won aught of love from the loveless, the miserable Atreidae.

Strophe 2—

Surely his mother, full of years and white with eld, will uplift a voice of wailing when she hears that he hath been stricken with the spirit's ruin: not in the nightingale's plaintive note will she utter her anguish: in shrill-toned strains the dirge will rise, with sound of hands that smite the breast, and with rending of hoary hair.

Antistrophe 2—

Yes, better hid with Hades is he whom vain fancies vex; he who by the lineage whence he springs is noblest of the war-tried Achaeans, yet now is true no more to the promptings of his inbred nature, but dwells with alien thoughts.

Ah, hapless sire, how heavy a curse upon thy son doth it rest for thee to hear, a curse which never yet hath clung to any life of the Aeacidae save his!

Enter AJAX, *with a sword in his hand.*

AJAX

All things the long and countless years first draw from darkness, then bury from light; and there is nothing for which man may not look; the dread

oath is vanquished, and the stubborn will. For even I, erst so wondrous firm—yea, as iron hardened in the dipping—felt the keen edge of my temper softened by yon woman's words; and I feel the pity of leaving her a widow with my foes, and the boy an orphan.

But I will go to the bathing-place and the meadows by the shore, that in purging of my stains I may flee the heavy anger of the goddess. Then I will seek out some untrodden spot, and bury this sword, hatefullest of weapons, in a hole dug where none shall see; no, let Night and Hades keep it underground! For since my hand took this gift from Hector, my worst foe, to this hour I have had no good from the Greeks. Yes, men's proverb is true: *The gifts of enemies are no gifts, and bring no good.*

Therefore henceforth I shall know how to yield to the gods, and learn to revere the Atreidae. They are rulers, so we must submit. How else? Dread things and things most potent bow to office; thus it is that snow-strewn winter gives place to fruitful summer; and thus night's weary round makes room for day with her white steeds to kindle light; and the breath of dreadful winds can allow the groaning sea to slumber; and, like the rest, almighty Sleep looses whom he has bound, nor holds with a perpetual grasp.

And we—must we not learn discretion? I, at least, will learn it; for I am newly aware that our enemy is to be hated but as one who will hereafter be a friend; and towards a friend I would wish but thus far to show aid and service, as knowing that he will not always abide. For to most men the haven of friendship is false.

But concerning these things it will be well. Woman, go thou within, and pray to the gods that in all fulness the desires of my heart may be fulfilled. And ye, my friends—honour ye these my wishes even as she doth; and bid Teucer, when he comes, have care for me, and good-will towards you withal. For I will go whither I must pass; but do ye what I bid; and ere long, perchance, though now I suffer, ye will hear that I have found peace.

Exit Ajax.

Strophe—

Chorus

I thrill with rapture, I soar on the wings of sudden joy! O Pan, O Pan, appear to us, O Pan, roving o'er the sea, from the craggy ridge of snow-beaten Cyllenè, king who makest dances for the gods, that with me thou

mayest move blithely in the measures that none hath taught thee, the measures of Nysa and of Cnosus! For now am I fain to dance. And may Apollo, lord of Delos, come over the Icarian waters to be with me, in presence manifest and spirit ever kind!

Antistrophe—

The destroying god hath lifted the cloud of dread trouble from our eyes. Joy, joy! Now, once again, now, Zeus, can the pure brightness of good days come to the swift sea-cleaving ships; since Ajax again forgets his trouble, and hath turned to perform the law of the gods with all due rites, in perfectness of loyal worship.

The strong years make all things fade; nor would I say that aught was too strange for belief, when thus, beyond our hopes, Ajax hath been led to repent of his wrath against the Atreidae, and his dread feuds.

Enter Messenger *from the Greek camp.*

Messenger

Friends, I would first tell you this—Teucer is but now returned from the Mysian heights; he hath come to the generals' quarters in mid camp, and is being reviled by all the Greeks at once. They knew him from afar as he drew near—gathered around him—and then assailed him with taunts from this side and from that, every man of them—calling him 'that kinsman of the maniac, of the plotter against the host,'—saying that he should not save himself from being mangled to death by stoning. And so they had come to this, that swords plucked from sheaths were drawn in men's hands; then the strife, when it had run well-nigh to the furthest, was allayed by the soothing words of elders. But where shall I find Ajax, to tell him this? He whom most it touches must hear all the tale.

Chorus

He is not within; he hath gone forth but now; for he hath yoked a new purpose to his new mood.

Messenger

Alas! Alas! Too late, then, was he who sent me on this errand—or I have proved a laggard.

Chorus

And what urgent business hath been scanted here?

Messenger

Teucer enjoined that the man should not go forth from the house, until he himself should come.

Chorus

Well, he is gone, I tell thee—intent on the purpose that is best for him—to make his peace with the gods.

Messenger

These are the words of wild folly, if there is wisdom in the prophecy of Calchas.

Chorus

What doth he prophesy? And what knowledge of this matter dost thou bring?

Messenger

Thus much I know—for I was present. Leaving the circle of chiefs who sat in council, Calchas drew apart from the Atreidae: then he put his right hand with all kindness in the hand of Teucer, and straitly charged him that, by all means in his power, he should keep Ajax within the house for this day that now is shining on us, and suffer him not to go abroad—if he wished ever to behold him alive. This day alone will the wrath of divine Athena vex him—so ran the warning.

'Yea,' said the seer, 'lives that have waxed too proud, and avail for good no more, are struck down by heavy misfortunes from the gods, as often as one born to man's estate forgets it in thoughts too high for man. But Ajax, even at his first going forth from home, was found foolish, when his sire spake well. His father said unto him: "My son, seek victory in arms, but seek it ever with the help of heaven." Then haughtily and foolishly he answered: "Father, with the help of gods e'en a man of nought might win the mastery; but I, even without their aid, trust to bring that glory within my grasp." So proud was his vaunt. Then once again, in answer to divine Athena—when she was urging him onward and bidding him turn a deadly hand upon his foes—in that hour he uttered a speech too dread for mortal lips: "Queen, stand thou beside the other Greeks; where Ajax stands, battle will never break our line." By such words it was that he brought upon him the appalling anger of the goddess, since his thoughts were too great for man. But if he lives this day, perchance with the god's help we may find means to save him.'

Thus far the seer: and Teucer had no sooner risen from where they sat

than he sent me with these mandates for thy guidance. But if we have been foiled, that man lives not, or Calchas is no prophet.

Chorus

Hapless Tecmessa, born to misery, come forth and see what tidings yon man tells; this peril touches us too closely for our peace.

Enter Tecmessa.

Tecmessa

Why do ye break my rest again, ah me, when I had but just found peace from relentless woes?

Chorus

Hearken to yon man, and the tidings of Ajax that he hath brought us, to my grief.

Tecmessa

Alas, what sayest thou, man? Are we undone?

Messenger

I know not of thy fortune, but only that, if Ajax is abroad, my mind is ill at ease for him.

Tecmessa

He is abroad indeed, so that I am in anguish to know thy meaning.

Messenger

Teucer straitly commands that ye keep Ajax under shelter of the roof, and suffer him not to go forth alone.

Tecmessa

And where is Teucer, and wherefore speaks he thus?

Messenger

He hath but now returned; and forbodes that this going forth is fraught with death to Ajax.

Tecmessa

Unhappy me! from whom can he have learned this?

Messenger

From Thestor's son, the seer, this day—when the issue is one of life or death for Ajax.

Tecmessa

Ah me, my friends, protect me from the doom threatened by fate! Speed, some of you, to hasten Teucer's coming; let others go to the westward bays, and others to the eastward, and seek the man's ill-omened steps. I see now that I have been deceived by my lord, and cast out of the favour that once I found with him. Ah me, my child, what shall I do? We must not sit idle—nay, I too will go as far as I have strength. Away—let us be quick—'tis no time to rest, if we would save a man who is in haste to die.

Chorus

I am ready, and will show it in more than word; speed of act and foot shall go therewith.

The scene changes to a lonely place on the sea-shore.

Enter Ajax.

Ajax

The slayer stands so that he shall do his work most surely—if leisure serves for so much thought—the gift of Hector, that foeman-friend who was most hateful to my soul and to my sight; 'tis fixed in hostile soil, the land of Troy, with a new edge from the iron-biting whet; and I have planted it with heedful care, so that it should prove most kindly to me in a speedy death.

Thus on my part all is ready; and next be thou, Zeus—as is meet—the first to aid me: 'tis no large boon that I will crave. Send, I pray thee, some messenger with the ill news to Teucer, that he may be the first to raise me where I have fallen on this reeking sword, lest I be first espied by some enemy, and cast forth a prey to dogs and birds. For thus much, O Zeus, I entreat thee; and I call also on Hermes, guide to the nether world, that he lay me softly asleep, without a struggle, at one quick bound, when I have driven this sword into my side.

And I call for help to the maidens who live for ever, and ever look on all the woes of men, the dread, far-striding Furies; let them mark how my miserable life is blasted by the Atreidae. And may they overtake those evil men with doom most evil and with utter blight [even as they behold me fall self-slain, so, slain by kinsfolk, may those men perish at the hand of their best-loved offspring]. Come, ye swift and vengeful Furies, glut your wrath on all the host, and spare not!

And thou whose chariot-wheels climb the heights of heaven, thou Sun-god, when thou lookest on the land of my sires, draw in thy rein o'erspread

with gold, and tell my disasters and my death to mine aged father and to the hapless woman who reared me. Poor mother! I think, when she hears those tidings, her loud wail will ring through all the city. But it avails not to make idle moan: now for the deed, as quickly as I may.

O Death, Death, come now and look upon me! Nay, to thee will I speak in that other world also, when I am with thee. But thee, thou present beam of the bright day, and the Sun in his chariot, I accost for the last, last time—as never more hereafter. O sunlight! O sacred soil of mine own Salamis, firm seat of my father's hearth! O famous Athens, and thy race kindred to mine! And ye, springs and rivers of this land—and ye plains of Troy, I greet you also—farewell, ye who have cherished my life! This is the last word that Ajax speaks to you: henceforth he will speak in Hades with the dead.

AJAX *falls upon his sword.*

The CHORUS *re-enters, in two bands.*

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Toil follows toil, and brings but toil! Where, where have my steps not been? And still no place is conscious of a secret that I share. Hark—a sudden noise!

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

'Tis we, the shipmates of your voyage.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

How goes it?

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

All the westward side of the ships hath been paced.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Well, hast thou found aught?

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

Only much toil, and nothing more to see.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

And clearly the man hath not been seen either along the path that fronts the morning ray.

Strophe—

CHORUS

O for tidings from some toiling fisher, busy about his sleepless quest—or from some nymph of the Olympian heights, or of the streams that flow toward Bosporus—if anywhere such hath seen the man of fierce spirit roaming! 'Tis hard that I, the wanderer who have toiled so long, cannot come near him with prospered course, but fail to descry where the sick man is.

Tecmessa

Ah me, ah me!

Chorus

Whose cry broke from the covert of the wood near us?

Tecmessa

Ah, miserable!

Chorus

I see the spear-won bride, hapless Tecmessa: her soul is steeped in the anguish of that wail.

Tecmessa

I am lost, undone, left desolate, my friends!

Chorus

What ails thee?

Tecmessa

Here lies our Ajax, newly slain—a sword buried and sheathed in his corpse.

Chorus

Alas for my hopes of return! Ah, prince, thou hast slain me, the comrade of thy voyage! Hapless man—broken-hearted woman!

Tecmessa

Even thus is it with him: 'tis ours to wail.

Chorus

By whose hand, then, can the wretched man have done the deed?

Tecmessa

By his own; 'tis well seen: this sword, which he planted in the ground, and on which he fell, convicts him.

Chorus

Alas for my blind folly, all alone, then, thou hast fallen in blood, unwatched of friends! And I took no heed, so dull was I, so witless! Where, where lies Ajax, that wayward one, of ill-boding name?

Tecmessa

No eye shall look on him; nay, in this enfolding robe I will shroud him wholly; for no man who loved him could bear to see him, as up to nostril and forth from red gash he spirts the darkened blood from the self-dealt wound. Ah me, what shall I do? What friend shall lift thee in his arms? Where is Teucer? How timely would be his arrival, might he but come, to compose the corpse of this his brother! Ah, hapless Ajax, from what height fallen how low! How worthy, even in the sight of foes, to be mourned!

Antistrophe—

Chorus

Thou wast fated, hapless one, thou wast fated, then, with that unbending soul, at last to work out an evil doom of woes untold! Such was the omen of those complainings which by night and by day I heard thee utter in thy fierce mood, bitter against the Atreidae with a deadly passion. Aye, that time was a potent source of sorrows, when the golden arms were made the prize in a contest of prowess!

Tecmessa

Woe, woe is me!

Chorus

The anguish pierces, I know, to thy true heart.

Tecmessa

Woe, woe is me!

Chorus

I marvel not, lady, that thou shouldst wail, and wail again, who hast lately been bereft of one so loved.

Tecmessa

'Tis for thee to conjecture of these things—for me, to feel them but too sorely.

Chorus

Yea, even so.

Tecmessa

Alas, my child, to what a yoke of bondage are we coming, seeing what task-masters are set over thee and me!

Chorus

Oh, the two Atreidae would be ruthless—those deeds of theirs would be unspeakable, which thou namest in hinting at such a woe! But may the gods avert it!

Tecmessa

Never had these things stood thus, save by the will of the gods.

Chorus

Yea, they have laid on us a burden too heavy to be borne.

Tecmessa

Yet such the woe that the daughter of Zeus, the dread goddess, engenders for Odysseus' sake.

Chorus

Doubtless, the patient hero exults in his dark soul, and mocks with keen mockery at these sorrows born of frenzy. Alas! And with him, when they hear the tidings, laugh the royal brothers, the Atreidae.

Tecmessa

Then let them mock, and exult in this man's woes. Perchance, though they missed him not while he lived, they will bewail him dead, in the straits of warfare. Ill-judging men know not the good that was in their hands, till they have lost it. To my pain hath he died more than for their joy, and to his own content. All that he yearned to win hath he made his own—the death for which he longed. Over this man, then, wherefore should they triumph? His death concerns the gods, not them—no, verily. Then let Odysseus revel in empty taunts. Ajax is for them no more: to me he hath left anguish and mourning—and is gone.

Teucer, *approaching*.

Woe, woe is me!

Chorus

Hush—methinks I hear the voice of Teucer, raised in a strain that hath regard to this dire woe.

Enter Teucer.

TEUCER
Beloved Ajax, brother whose face was so dear to me—hast thou indeed fared as rumour holds?

CHORUS
He hath perished, Teucer: of that be sure.

TEUCER
Woe is me, then, for my heavy fate!

CHORUS
Know that thus it stands—

TEUCER
Hapless, hapless that I am!

CHORUS
And thou hast cause to mourn.

TEUCER
O fierce and sudden blow!

CHORUS
Thou sayest but too truly, Teucer.

TEUCER
Ay me! But tell me of yon man's child—where shall I find him in the land of Troy?

CHORUS
Alone, by the tent.

TEUCER
(*To* TECMESSA.) Then bring him hither with all speed, lest some foeman snatch him up, as a whelp from a lioness forlorn! Away—haste—bear help! 'Tis all men's wont to triumph o'er the dead, when they lie low.

Exit TECMESSA.

CHORUS
Yea, while he yet lived, Teucer, yon man charged thee to have care for the child, even as thou hast care indeed.

TEUCER
O sight most grievous to me of all that ever mine eyes have beheld! O bitter to my heart above all paths that I have trod, the path that now hath

led me hither, when I learned thy fate, ah best-loved Ajax, as I was pursuing and tracking out thy footsteps! For a swift rumour about thee, as from some god, passed through the Greek host, telling that thou wast dead and gone. I heard it, ah me, while yet far off, and groaned low; but now the sight breaks my heart!

Come—lift the covering, and let me see the worst.

The corpse of Ajax *is uncovered.*

O thou form dread to look on, wherein dwelt such cruel courage, what sorrows hast thou sown for me in thy death!

Whither can I betake me, to what people, after bringing thee no succour in thy troubles? Telamon, methinks, thy sire and mine, is like to greet me with sunny face and gracious mien, when I come without thee. Aye, surely—he who, even when good fortune befalls him, is not wont to smile more brightly than before.

What will such an one keep back? What taunt will he not utter against the bastard begotten from the war-prize of his spear—against him who betrayed thee, beloved Ajax, like a coward and a craven—or by guile, that, when thou wast dead, he might enjoy thy lordship and thy house? So will he speak—a passionate man, peevish in old age, whose wrath makes strife even without a cause. And in the end I shall be thrust from the realm, and cast off—branded by his taunts as no more a freeman but a slave.

Such is my prospect at home; while at Troy I have many foes, and few things to help me. All this have I reaped by thy death! Ah me, what shall I do? how draw thee, hapless one, from the cruel point of this gleaming sword, the slayer, it seems, to whom thou hast yielded up thy breath? Now seest thou how Hector, though dead, was to destroy thee at the last?

Consider, I pray you, the fortune of these two men. With the very girdle that had been given to him by Ajax, Hector was gripped to the chariot-rail, and mangled till he gave up the ghost. 'Twas from Hector that Ajax had this gift, and by this hath he perished in his deadly fall. Was it not the Fury who forged this blade, was not that girdle wrought by Hades, grim artificer? I, at least, would deem that these things, and all things ever, are planned by gods for men; but if there be any in whose mind this wins no favour, let him hold to his own thoughts, as I hold to mine.

Chorus

Speak not at length, but think how thou shalt lay the man in the tomb,

and what thou wilt say anon: for I see a foe, and perchance he will come with mocking of our sorrows, as evil-doers use.

TEUCER
And what man of the host dost thou behold?

CHORUS
Menelaüs, for whom we made this voyage.

TEUCER
I see him; he is not hard to know, when near.

Enter MENELAUS.

MENELAUS
Sirrah, I tell thee to bear no hand in raising yon corpse, but to leave it where it lies.

TEUCER
Wherefore hast thou spent thy breath in such proud words?

MENELAUS
'Tis my pleasure, and his who rules the host.

TEUCER
And might we hear what reason thou pretendest?

MENELAUS
This—that, when we had hoped we were bringing him from home to be an ally and a friend for the Greeks, we found him, on trial, a worse than Phrygian foe; who plotted death for all the host, and sallied by night against us, to slay with the spear; and, if some god had not quenched this attempt, ours would have been the lot which he hath found, to lie slain by an ignoble doom, while he would have been living. But now a god hath turned his outrage aside, to fall on sheep and cattle.

Wherefore there is no man so powerful that he shall entomb the corpse of Ajax; no, he shall be cast forth somewhere on the yellow sand, and become food for the birds by the sea. Then raise no storm of angry threats. If we were not able to control him while he lived, at least we shall rule him in death, whether thou wilt or not, and control him with our hands; since, while he lived, there never was a time when he would hearken to my words.

Yet 'tis the sign of an unworthy nature when a subject deigns not to obey

those who are set over him. Never can the laws have prosperous course in a city where dread hath no place; nor can a camp be ruled discreetly any more, if it lack the guarding force of fear and reverence. Nay, though a man's frame have waxed mighty, he should look to fall, perchance, by a light blow. Whoso hath fear, and shame therewith, be sure that he is safe; but where there is licence to insult and act at will, doubt not that such a State, though favouring gales have sped her, some day, at last, sinks into the depths.

No, let me see fear, too, where fear is meet, established; let us not dream that we can do after our desires, without paying the price in our pains. These things come by turns. This man was once hot and insolent; now 'tis my hour to be haughty. And I warn thee not to bury him, lest through that deed thou thyself shouldst come to need a grave.

Chorus

Menelaüs, after laying down wise precepts, do not thyself be guilty of outrage on the dead.

Teucer

Never, friends, shall I wonder more if a low-born man offends after his kind, when they who are accounted of noble blood allow such scandalous words to pass their lips.

Come, tell me from the first once more—Sayest thou that *thou* broughtest the man hither to the Greeks, as an ally found by *thee?* Sailed he not forth of his own act—as his own master? What claim hast thou to be his chief? On what ground hast thou a right to kingship of the lieges whom he brought from home? As Sparta's king thou camest, not as master over us. Nowhere was it laid down among thy lawful powers that thou shouldst dictate to him, any more than he to thee. Under the command of others didst thou sail hither, not as chief of all, so that thou shouldst ever be captain over Ajax.

No, lord it over them whose lord thou art—lash them with thy proud words: but this man will I lay duly in the grave, though thou forbid it—aye, or thy brother-chief—nor shall I tremble at thy word. 'Twas not for thy wife's sake that Ajax came unto the war, like yon toil-worn drudges—no, but for the oath's sake that bound him—no whit for thine; he was not wont to reck of nobodies. So, when thou comest again, bring more heralds, and the Captain of the host; at *thy* noise I would not turn my

head, while thou art the man that thou art now.

Chorus

Such speech again, in the midst of ills, I love not; for harsh words, how just soever, sting.

Menelaus

The bowman, methinks, hath no little pride.

Teucer

Even so; 'tis no sordid craft that I profess.

Menelaus

How thou wouldst boast, wert thou given a shield!

Teucer

Without a shield, I were a match for thee full-armed.

Menelaus

How dreadful the courage that inspires thy tongue!

Teucer

When right is with him, a man's spirit may be high.

Menelaus

Is it right that this my murderer should have honour?

Teucer

Murderer? A marvel truly, if, though slain, thou livest.

Menelaus

A god rescued me: in yon man's purpose, I am dead.

Teucer

The gods have saved thee: then dishonour not the gods.

Menelaus

What, would *I* disparage the laws of Heaven?

Teucer

If thou art here to forbid the burying of the dead.

Menelaus

Yea, of my country's foes: for it is not meet.

Teucer

Did Ajax e'er confront thee as public foe?

Menelaus
There was hate betwixt us; thou, too, knewest this.

Teucer
Yea, 'twas found that thou hadst suborned votes, to rob him.

Menelaus
At the hands of the judges, not at mine, he had that fall.

Teucer
Thou couldst put a fair face on many a furtive villainy.

Menelaus
That saying tends to pain—I know, for whom.

Teucer
Not greater pain, methinks, than we shall inflict.

Menelaus
Hear my last word—that man must not be buried.

Teucer
And hear my answer—he shall be buried forthwith.

Menelaus
Once did I see a man bold of tongue, who had urged sailors to a voyage in time of storm, in whom thou wouldst have found no voice when the stress of the tempest was upon him, but, hidden beneath his cloak, he would suffer the crew to trample on him at will. And so with thee and thy fierce speech—perchance a great tempest, though its breath come from a little cloud, shall quench thy blustering.

Teucer
Yea, and I have seen a man full of folly, who triumphed in his neighbour's woes; and it came to pass that a man like unto me, and of like mood, beheld him, and spake such words as these: 'Man, do not evil to the dead; for, if thou dost, be sure that thou wilt come to harm.' So warned he the misguided one before him; and know that I see that man, and methinks he is none else but thou: have I spoken in riddles?

Menelaus
I will go—it were a disgrace to have it known that I was chiding when I have the power to compel.

Teucer

Begone then! For me 'tis the worse disgrace that I should listen to a fool's idle prate.

Exit Menelaus.

Chorus

a dread strife will be brought to the trial. But thou, Teucer, with what speed thou mayest, haste to seek a hollow grave for yon man. Where he shall rest in his dark, dank tomb, that men shall ever hold in fame.

Enter Tecmessa *and* Child.

Teucer

Lo, just in time our lord's child and his wife draw nigh, to tend the burial of the hapless corpse.

My child, come hither: take thy place near him, and lay thy hand, as a suppliant, upon thy sire. And kneel as one who implores help, with locks of hair in thy hand—mine, hers, and thirdly thine—the suppliant's store. But if any man of the host should tear thee by violence from this dead, then, for evil doom on evil deed, may he perish out of the land and find no grave, and with him be his race cut off, root and branch, even as I sever this lock. Take it, boy, and keep; and let no one move thee, but kneel there, and cling unto the dead.

And ye, be not as women at his side, but bear you like men for his defence, till I return, when I have prepared a grave for this man, though all the world forbid.

Exit Teucer.

Strophe 1—

Chorus

When, ah when, will the number of the restless years be full, at what term will they cease, that bring on me the unending woe of a warrior's toils throughout the wide land of Troy, for the sorrow and the shame of Greece?

Antistrophe 1—

Would that the man had passed into the depths of the sky, or to all-receiving Hades, who taught Greeks how to league themselves for war in hateful arms! Ah, those toils of his, from which so many toils have sprung! Yea, he it was who wrought the ruin of men.

Strophe 2—

No delight of garlands or bounteous wine-cups did that man give me for my portion, no sweet music of flutes, the wretch, or soothing rest in the night; and from love, alas, from love he hath divorced my days.

And here I have my couch, uncared for, while heavy dews ever wet my hair, lest I should forget that I am in the cheerless land of Troy.

Antistrophe 2—

Erewhile, bold Ajax was alway my defence against nightly terror and the darts of the foe; but now he hath become the sacrifice of a malignant fate. What joy, then, what joy shall crown me more?

O to be wafted where the wooded sea-cape stands upon the laving sea, O to pass beneath Sunium's level summit, that so we might greet sacred Athens!

Enter Teucer, *followed by* Agamemnon.

Teucer

Lo, I am come in haste, for I saw the Captain of the host, Agamemnon, moving hither apace; and I wot he will not bridle perverse lips.

Agamemnon

So 'tis thou, they tell me, who hast dared to open thy mouth with such blustering against us—and hast yet to smart for it? Yea, I mean thee—thee, the captive woman's son. Belike, hadst thou been bred of well-born mother, lofty had been thy vaunt and proud thy strut, when, nought as thou art, thou hast stood up for him who is as nought, and hast vowed that we came out with no title on sea or land to rule the Greeks or thee; no, as chief in his own right, thou sayest, sailed Ajax forth.

Are not these presumptuous taunts for us to hear from slaves? What was the man whom thou vauntest with such loud arrogance? Whither went he, or where stood he, where I was not? Have the Greeks, then, no other men but him? Methinks we shall rue that day when we called the Greeks to contest the arms of Achilles, if, whatever the issue, we are to be denounced as false by Teucer, and if ye never will consent, though defeated, to accept that doom for which most judges gave their voice, but must ever assail us somewhere with revilings, or stab us in the dark—ye, the losers in the race.

Now, where such ways prevail, no law could ever be firmly stablished, if we are to thrust the rightful winners aside, and bring the rearmost to the

front. Nay, this must be checked. 'Tis not the burly, broad-shouldered men that are surest at need; no, 'tis the wise who prevail in every field. A large-ribbed ox is yet kept straight on the road by a small whip. And this remedy, methinks, will visit thee ere long, if thou fail to gain some measure of wisdom; thou who, when the man lives no more, but is now a shade, art so boldly insolent, and givest such licence to thy tongue. Sober thyself, I say—recall thy birth—bring hither some one else—a freeborn man—who shall plead thy cause for thee before us. When thou speakest, I can take the sense no more; I understand not thy barbarian speech.

Chorus

Would that ye both could learn the wisdom of a temperate mind! No better counsel could I give you twain.

Teucer

Ah, gratitude to the dead—in what quick sort it falls away from men and is found a traitor, if this man hath no longer the slightest tribute of remembrance for thee, Ajax—he for whom thou didst toil so often, putting thine own life to the peril of the spear! No—'tis all forgotten—all flung aside!

Man who but now hast spoken many words and vain, hast thou no more memory of the time when ye were shut within your lines—when ye were as lost in the turning back of your battle—and he came alone and saved you—when the flames were already wrapping the decks at your ships' stern, and Hector was bounding high over the trench towards the vessels? Who averted that? Were these deeds not his, who, thou sayest, nowhere set foot where thou wast not?

Would ye allow that he did his duty there? Or when, another time, all alone, he confronted Hector in single fight—not at any man's bidding, but by right of ballot, for the lot which he cast in was not one to skulk behind, no lump of moist earth, but such as would be the first to leap lightly from the crested helm! His were these deeds, and at his side was I—the slave, the son of the barbarian mother.

Wretch, how canst thou be so blind as to rail thus? Knowst thou not that thy sire's sire was Pelops of old—a barbarian, a Phrygian? That Atreus, who begat thee, set before his brother a most impious feast—the flesh of that brother's children? And thou thyself wert born of a Cretan mother, with whom her sire found a paramour, and doomed her to be food for the

dumb fishes? Being such, makest thou his origin a reproach to such as I am? The father from whom I sprang is Telamon, who, as prize for valour peerless in the host, won my mother for his bride, by birth a princess, daughter of Laomedon; and as the flower of the spoil was she given to Telamon by Alcmena's son.

Thus nobly born from two noble parents, could I disgrace my kinsman, whom, now that such sore ills have laid him low, thou wouldst thrust forth without burial—yea, and art not ashamed to say it? Now be thou sure of this—wheresoever ye cast this man, with him ye will cast forth our three corpses also. It beseems me to die in his cause, before all men's eyes, rather than for thy wife—or thy brother's, should I say? Be prudent, therefore, not for my sake, but for thine own also; for, if thou harm me, thou wilt wish anon that thou hadst been a very coward, ere thy rashness had been wreaked on me.

Enter Odysseus.

Chorus

King Odysseus, know that thou hast come in season, if thou art here, not to embroil, but to mediate.

Odysseus

What ails you, friends? Far off I heard loud speech of the Atreidae over this brave man's corpse.

Agamemnon

Nay, King Odysseus, have we not been hearing but now most shameful taunts from yonder man?

Odysseus

How was that? I can pardon a man who is reviled if he engage in wordy war.

Agamemnon

I *had* reviled him; for his deeds toward me were vile.

Odysseus

And what did he unto thee, that thou hast a wrong?

Agamemnon

He says that he will not leave yon corpse ungraced by sepulture, but will bury it in my despite.

Odysseus

Now may a friend speak out the truth, and still, as ever, ply his oar in time with thine?

Agamemnon

Speak: else were I less than sane; for I count thee my greatest friend of all the Greeks.

Odysseus

Listen, then. For the love of the gods, take not the heart to cast forth this man unburied so ruthlessly; and in no wise let violence prevail with thee to hate so utterly that thou shouldest trample justice under foot.

To me also this man was once the worst foe in the army—from the day that I became master of the arms of Achilles; yet, for all that he was such toward me, never would I requite him with indignity, or refuse to avow that, in all our Greek host which came to Troy, I have seen none who was his peer, save Achilles. It were not just, then, that he should suffer dishonour at thy hand; 'tis not he, 'tis the law of Heaven that thou wouldst hurt. When a brave man is dead, 'tis not right to do him scathe—no, not even if thou hate him.

Agamemnon

Thou, Odysseus, thus his champion against me?

Odysseus

I am; yet hated him, when I could honourably hate.

Agamemnon

And shouldst thou not also set thy heel on him in death?

Odysseus

Delight not, son of Atreus, in gains which sully honour.

Agamemnon

'Tis not easy for a king to observe piety.

Odysseus

But he can show respect to his friends, when they counsel well.

Agamemnon

A loyal man should hearken to the rulers.

Odysseus

Enough—the victory is thine, when thou yieldest to thy friends.

Agamemnon
Remember to what a man thou showest the grace.

Odysseus
Yon man was erst my foe, yet noble.

Agamemnon
What canst thou mean? Such reverence for a dead foe?

Odysseus
His worth weighs with me far more than his enmity.

Agamemnon
Nay, such as thou are the unstable among men.

Odysseus
Full many are friends at one time, and foes anon.

Agamemnon
Dost thou approve, then, of our making such friends?

Odysseus
'Tis not my wont to approve a stubborn soul.

Agamemnon
Thou wilt make us appear cowards this day.

Odysseus
Not so, but just men in the sight of all the Greeks.

Agamemnon
So thou wouldst have me allow the burying of the dead?

Odysseus
Yea: for I too shall come to that need.

Agamemnon
Truly in all things alike each man works for himself!

Odysseus
And for whom should I work rather than for myself?

Agamemnon
It must be called thy doing, then, not mine.

Odysseus
Call it whose thou wilt, in any case thou wilt be kind.

Agamemnon

Nay, be well assured that I would grant thee a larger boon than this; yon man, however, as on earth, so in the shades, shall have my hatred. But thou canst do what thou wilt.

Exit Agamemnon.

Chorus

Whoso saith, Odysseus, that thou hast not inborn wisdom, being such as thou art, that man is foolish.

Odysseus

Yea, and I tell Teucer now that henceforth I am ready to be his friend—as staunch as I was once a foe. And I would join in the burying of your dead, and partake your cares, and omit no service which mortals should render to the noblest among men.

Teucer

Noble Odysseus, I have only praise to give thee for thy words; and greatly hast thou belied my fears. Thou wast his deadliest foe of all the Greeks, yet thou alone hast stood by him with active aid; thou hast found no heart, in this presence, to heap the insults of the living on the dead—like yon crazed chief that came, he and his brother, and would have cast forth the outraged corpse without burial. Therefore may the Father supreme in the heaven above us, and the remembering Fury, and Justice that brings the end, destroy those evil men with evil doom, even as they sought to cast forth this man with unmerited despite.

But, son of aged Laertes, I scruple to admit thy helping hand in these funeral rites, lest so I do displeasure to the dead; in all else be thou indeed our fellow-worker; and if thou wouldst bring any man of the host, we shall make thee welcome. For the rest, I will make all things ready; and know that to us thou hast been a generous friend.

Odysseus

It was my wish; but if it is not pleasing to thee that I should assist here, I accept thy decision, and depart.

Exit Odysseus.

Teucer

Enough: already the delay hath been long drawn out. Come, haste some of you to dig the hollow grave—place, some, the high-set caldron girt

with fire, in readiness for holy ablution; and let another band bring the body-armour from the tent.

And thou, too, child, with such strength as thou hast, lay a loving hand upon thy sire, and help me to uplift this prostrate form; for still the warm channels are spouting upward their dark tide.

Come, each one here who owns the name of friend—haste, away, in service to this man of perfect prowess; and never yet was service rendered to a nobler among men.

Chorus

Many things shall mortals learn by seeing; but, before he sees, no man may read the future, or his fate.

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